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# Nomadography: The 'Early' Deleuze and the History of Philosophy

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***Abstract***

*Deleuze's career is frequently divided between his "early" monographs devoted to the history of philosophy and his more mature work, including the collaborations with Félix Guattari, written "in his own voice." Yet Deleuze's early work is integral to the later writings; far from merely summarizing Hume, Nietzsche, Bergson, or Spinoza, Deleuze transforms their thought in such a way that they become new, fresh, and strange. Deleuze's distaste for the Hegelian institution of the history of philosophy is overcome by his peculiar approach to it, by which he transforms the project into something else, a nomadography that projects an alternative line of flight, not only allowing Deleuze to "get out" of the institution, but allowing us to re-imagine it in productive new ways. Deleuze's nomad thinkers are like sudden, bewildering eruptions of "joyful wisdom" in an apparent continuum of stable meanings, standard commentaries, settled thought. The early Deleuze, by engaging these thinkers, discovered a new way of doing philosophy.*

> I belong to a generation, one of the last generations, that was more or less bludgeoned to death with the history of philosophy. [. . .] Many members of my generation never broke free of this; others did, by inventing their own particular methods and new rules, a new approach. I myself "did" history of philosophy for a long time, read books on this or that author. But I compensated in various ways: by concentrating, in the first place, on authors who challenged the rationalist tradition in this history (and I see a secret link between Lucretius, Hume, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, constituted by their critique of negativity, their cultivation of joy, the denunciation of power . . . and so on).
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> Gilles Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic"[1]

In his *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel says that "What the history of philosophy displays to us is a series of noble spirits, the gallery of the heroes of *reason*'s thinking," but that the history of philosophy would have little value if thought of as a mere collection of opinions, in themselves arbitrary and thus worthless: "But philosophy contains no opinions; there are no philosophical opinions."[2] Hence, Hegel says, those who wish to understand the history of philosophy by studying the individual philosophers it comprises, rather than achieving a more universal idea of the totality of its thought, will be missing the forest for the trees. "Anyone who starts by examining the trees, and sticks simply to them, does not survey the whole wood and gets lost and

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[1] Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic," in *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. M. Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press. 1995), p. 5-6.

[2] G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. T.M. Knox and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1985), p. 9, 17 .

bewildered in it."[3] For Hegel, the history of philosophy is the overarching concept, and the evolutionary realization, of philosophy itself.

Let it be said up front: Gilles Deleuze hates this history of philosophy. Indeed, he does not care for the philosopher and philosophy underlying that view: "What I most detested was Hegelianism and dialectics."[4] However, Deleuze does not abandon or reject the history of philosophy. Rather, he transforms the project into something else, a "nomadography," which projects an alternative history of philosophy that not only allows Deleuze to "get out" of that institution, but allows us to re-imagine it in productive new ways. Deleuze's distaste for the history of philosophy, the Hegelian institution presented to him and his contemporaries in school and which formed a basic requirement of the profession of philosophy in France, is overcome by his peculiar approach to the history of philosophy, an approach that redeems philosophy as it transfigures it.

Typically, any discussion of Deleuze's career draws a line between his "early" work, those monographs produced between 1953 and 1968 dealing with individual figures from the history of Western philosophy, and Deleuze's later work "written in his own voice" (such as *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*),[5] followed by his 1970s-era collaborations with Félix Guattari, and finally with his diverse post-*Capitalism and Schizophrenia* writings, culminating perhaps in *What is Philosophy?* (also co-authored with Guattari). Although Deleuze himself has remarked that his early works were devoted to the history of philosophy, readers of his entire oeuvre will notice that the concerns animating those early studies are still engaged in his later work. Moreover, one could say that Deleuze *never* really stopped "doing" the history of philosophy, albeit in his own rather eccentric way. In addition to those early monographs on Hume,[6] Nietzsche,[7] Kant,[8] Bergson,[9] and Spinoza,[10] Deleuze wrote studies devoted to the philosophers Leibniz, Foucault, and his old friend François Châtelet,[11] as well as maintaining an ongoing

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[3] Hegel, *Introduction*, p. 94.
[4] Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic," p. 6.
[5] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [1968], trans. P. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press. 1994); and Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* [1969], trans. M. Lester and C. Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).
[6] Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature* [1953], trans. C.V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
[7] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* [1962], trans. H. Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press. 1983; see also Deleuze, *Nietzsche* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965).
[8] Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy* [1963], trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
[9] Deleuze, *Bergsonism* [1966], trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988).
[10] Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* [1968], trans. M. Joughin (New York: Zone Books. 1990); and Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* [1970], trans. R. Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988).
[11] Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* [1988], trans. T. Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1993); Deleuze, *Foucault* [1986], trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1988); and Deleuze, "Pericles and Verdi: The

conversations with his nomad thinkers and other figures from the history of philosophy in the collaborations with Guattari,[12] in his dealings with literature (including a book on Proust and a lengthy essay on Sacher-Masoch,[13] in addition to the Kafka study), and in his books on cinema and on Francis Bacon,[14] to name just the book-length studies; his essays and other shorter works frequently address the history of philosophy. Yet it is in his earlier works that Deleuze most carefully identifies that nomadic line of flight within the Western philosophical tradition, the counter-history of philosophy or nomadography that typifies Deleuze's radically creative engagement with philosophy.

Deleuze's distinction between State philosophy and nomad thought is perhaps best known through his essay on Nietzsche titled "Nomad Thought" and in his more elaborate discussion of "Nomadology" in *A Thousand Plateaus.*[15] However, Deleuze had already made the distinction as early as 1968, in *Difference and Repetition*, in which he distinguishes between a "nomadic distribution" of the various components of Being in Spinoza, opposing it to the Cartesian theory of substances that, like the agricultural or statist model, distributes elements of Being by dividing them into fixed categories, demarcating territories and fencing them off from one another. Deleuze notes that the statist or Cartesian distribution of Being is rooted to the agricultural need to set proprietary boundaries and fix stable domains. Alternatively, there is "a completely other distribution, which must be called nomadic, a nomad *nomos*, without property, enclosure or measure," that does not involve "a division of that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute themselves in an open space–a space which is unlimited, or at least without precise limits."[16] Deleuze's nomad thinkers, like (and, of course, including) Spinoza, would partake in such an ontological and ethical philosophy, in one way or another–the "secret link" Deleuze refers to in his letter to Michel Cressole. These nomads are themselves distributed throughout the history of philosophy while also

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Philosophy of François Châtelet" [1988], trans. C.T. Wolfe. *The Opera Quarterly* v. 21, n. 4, 2005, p. 716–724 .

[12] Deleuze's books co-authored with Guattari include *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1972], trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H.R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* [1975] trans. D. Polan Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1986); *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); and *What is Philosophy?* [1991], trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[13] Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* [1964], trans. R. Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Deleuze, *Masochism* [1967], trans. J. McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1989).

[14] Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* [1983], trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* [1985], trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); and Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* [1981], trans. Daniel W. Smith (New York: Continuum Books, 2003).

[15] Deleuze, "Nomad Thought" [1973], trans. D. Allison, in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. D. Allison (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1977), p. 142–149; see also Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 351–423.

[16] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 36.

standing somewhat outside of it. "I liked writers who seemed to be part of the history of philosophy, but who escaped from it in one respect, or altogether: Lucretius, Spinoza, Hume, Nietzsche, Bergson."[17] For Deleuze, these thinkers stand apart from, or even athwart, a philosophical tradition which has ever associated itself with the State. "For thought borrows its properly philosophical image from the state as beautiful, substantial or subjective interiority. . . Philosophy is shot through with the project of becoming the official language of a Pure State."[18] Although Descartes and Hegel would seem to be State philosophers *par excellence*, the nomad-versus-State distinction finds an unexpected precursor in Immanuel Kant, an "enemy" to which Deleuze devoted a study.[19]

In the 1781 preface to the first edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant names metaphysics "the Queen of all the sciences," emphatically identifying philosophy with the State. Kant writes that the chief threat to this Queen's beneficent government lay in the forces of the skeptics, "a species of nomads, despising all modes of settled life, [who] broke up from time to time all civil society. Happily they were few in number, and were unable to prevent its being established ever anew."[20] Of course, Kant was also wary of the dogmatists, under whose administration the Queen's government was "despotic," which led in part to the "complete anarchy" that allowed those nomads to breach the walls of the kingdom. Kant's metaphor establishes the conflicting philosophical traditions explicitly as statist on the one hand and nomadic on the other. From this somewhat playful usage, we can see already in Kant the Deleuze's distinction between State philosophy and nomad thought, although, of course, Deleuze view the nomads as a positive force, in more ways than one. Moreover, Kant makes this distinction specifically in the context of the history of philosophy, and one may approach that history as a battle between the contesting forces of State philosophy and nomad thought. Deleuze's interventions into the history of philosophy, then, may be seen as a nomadography, an alternative path through Hegel's dense forest, yielding unexpected discoveries and innovative concepts.

This terrain is the playground and the laboratory of the "early" Deleuze. In fact, even at his "earliest," Deleuze was already known for his transformative analyses of the history of philosophy. In his 1977 autobiography, *The Wind Spirit*, Michel Tournier describes his first encounter with the young philosopher-in-formation when they were still teenagers, but already Tournier marveled at Deleuze's "intellectual rigor and speculative reach." "The arguments my friends and I tossed back and forth among ourselves were like balls of cotton or rubber compared with the iron and steel cannonballs that he hurled at us."[21] Deleuze was "the soul" of the young group, and "philosophy was to be our calling," which meant that they would be steeped in the history of philosophy. "Most of us would become guardians of those twelve citadels of granite named for their 'placental' progenitors: Plato,

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[17] Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* [1977], trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 14–15.

[18] Ibid., p.13.

[19] See Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic," p. 6 ; see also Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*.

[20] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 8–9.

[21] Michel Tourier, *The Wind Spirit: An Autobiography*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 127–28.

Aristotle, Saint Thomas, Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz, Berkeley, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. As professors of philosophy we would be responsible for initiating young people into the study of these historical monuments, grander and more majestic than anything else mankind has yet to offer."[22] The unlikely dream would be to become a "placental" progenitor, to give birth to a new philosophical system oneself. And, to the extent that Deleuzian thought may be thought of as a system, it is clear that his philosophy—for example, the concepts set forth in his *What is Philosophy?*–were developed and refined throughout his early interactions with those figures in the history of philosophy with which he so frequently grapples.

The Deleuze whom Tournier recalls is certainly "early," about 15 or 16 years old. But even here Deleuze's prodigious intellect is visible, especially with respect to his ability to transform traditional ideas into bold new concepts. As Tournier put it, Deleuze "possessed extraordinary powers of translation and rearrangement: all the tired philosophy of the curriculum passed through him and emerged unrecognizable but rejuvenated, with a fresh, undigested, bitter taste of newness that we weaker, lazier minds found disconcerting and repulsive."[23] Deleuze later proved just how rejuvenated the tired old philosophy of certain citadels in the history of philosophy could really be. Deleuze returns again and again to older, perhaps canonical figures in the history of Western philosophy, producing what might have seemed to be fairly straightforward studies by the standards of the profession; of course, in retrospect, we know that Deleuze's seemingly conservative interventions were actually moments in the development of a radically new philosophy. In these returns to some of the great figures of Western philosophy, Deleuze revives matters fundamental to, say, seventeenth–or eighteenth-century thought, and, at the same time, Deleuze demonstrates the contemporaneity of such philosophical problems in our time.

Some may find it ironic, perhaps, that while Deleuze has paid so much attention to the history of philosophy, he has also been an ardent critic, even adversary, of this institution. In *Dialogues*, for example, Deleuze says that the "history of philosophy has always been the great agent of power in the philosophy, and even in thought. It is played to repressor's role: how can you think without having read Plato, Descartes, Kant and Heidegger, and so-and-so's book about them? A formidable school of intimidation which manufactures specialists in thought–but which also makes those who stay outside conform all the more to this specialism which they despise. An image of thought called philosophy has been formed historically and it effectively stops people from thinking."[24] Or, in Nietzschean terms, the history of philosophy is both a product and a producer of a priestly class who would guard over the sacred texts, regulating not only what can, and must, be read, but also how this canon will be read. Deleuze is aware of the institutional power of the history of philosophy, of its relations to State philosophy, and yet he does not avoid it, but rather faces it head-on, enlisting the aid of those nomad thinkers who are both part of the history of philosophy and yet outside of it as well. In Deleuze's early writings, we see this battle unfold.

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[22] Ibid., p.129–30.
[23] Ibid., p.128.
[24] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 13.

By now, a number of scholars and critics have examined Deleuze's early writings, and, for the purposes of this essay, I am less interested in providing my own take on those specific studies than in looking at how Deleuze's approach both transformed and offered a nomadic alternative to the history of philosophy. Michael Hardt's *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, one of the first studies devoted to Deleuze's early writings, offers a nice reading of Deleuze's studies of Bergson, Nietzsche, and Spinoza (Hardt does not really look at Deleuze's book on Hume).[25] Notwithstanding the implication of the subtitle, Hardt's fundamental argument is that Deleuze's political and philosophical thought is constructed through his early interaction with these authors. That is, these works are not merely occasions for Deleuze to practice becoming a philosopher, but important Deleuzian philosophical texts in themselves. Hardt identifies a progressive, evolutionary project in which Deleuze's own thought develops through Bergson's ontology, Nietzsche's ethics, and Spinoza's practice, culminating in a full-blown philosophy already visible prior to Deleuze's works written "in his own voice."

This last phrase is unfortunate and a bit misleading, but it has been the standard view of Deleuze's career. As Brian Massumi had put it, in introducing *A Thousand Plateaus* and again in his *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze's early work is limited to traditional (and repressive) history of philosophy. "Gilles Deleuze was schooled in that philosophy. The titles of his earliest books read like a who's who of philosophical giants." Massumi includes a backhandedly compliment that is paradoxically inclusive of the early monographs—"Yet much of value came of Deleuze's flirtation with the greats"—before dismissing these works entirely by averring that *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* were "Deleuze's first major statements written in his own voice."[26] The inappropriateness of the phrase, "written in his own voice," is apparent by simply reading Deleuze's early books, which are not simple primers or commentaries on other thinkers. Deleuze is not simply restating or summarizing Hume's theory of human nature, Bergson's ideas of time and being, Nietzsche's transvaluation of values, or Spinoza's practical philosophy. Rather, as Tournier suggested, Deleuze transformed these philosophies and restated them in such a way that they become new, fresh, and also strange. Indeed, Deleuze may be at his *most* original when returning to these figures from the history of philosophy—a *return with difference*, one might say—and developing his new monsters from the encounter. In a famous and mischievous metaphor, Deleuze has described his approach as a form of sexual activity (or parting of the buttocks: *enculage*) in which he impregnates the philosopher in question who then gives birth to monstrous offspring. Deleuze says that he viewed "the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all the

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[25] Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[26] Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to* Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 2. The language here is nearly identical to that of his "Translator's Foreword: The Pleasures of Philosophy," in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. ix–x.

shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed."[27] Hence, even where Deleuze had endeavored to present the philosopher's own thoughts, he undoubtedly, and perhaps inevitably, intended to present his own as well.

Massumi and others may be forgiven for viewing the work of the "early Deleuze" as wholly separate or in another voice from the work of the middle or later Deleuze, since Deleuze himself has invited the comparison by referring to his having "paid off my debts" and writing "yet more books on my own account."[28] But Deleuze had also suggested that the way in which his own philosophy came into being was by a process of philosophical buggery similar to that described above. "It was Nietzsche, who I read only later, who extricated me from all this. Because you just can't deal with him in the same sort of way. He gets up to all sorts of things behind *your* back."[29] Delighting in the mildly scandalous wordplay that allows "doing things behind one's back" (i.e., furtively or covertly) to also suggest sexual acts, Deleuze proposes that his *own* thought is itself the monstrous offspring of his encounter with Nietzsche. The *enculage* that typifies Deleuze's approach to the history of philosophy thus becomes a two-way exchange, a reversible relation of power—like erotic love, Michel Foucault would say[30]—in which the history of philosophy, the "nomadography" formed by Deleuze's encounters with his nomad thinkers, also creates Deleuzian thought. Hence, the first rule in dealing with Deleuze's early interventions into the history of philosophy is to recognize that we are indeed reading *Deleuze*, not merely reading commentary on Hume, Nietzsche, Bergson, or Spinoza. But the Deleuze we read, whether in the early works or elsewhere, is himself a multiplicity: "Individuals find a real name for themselves, rather, only through the harshest exercise in depersonalization, by opening themselves up to the multiplicities everywhere within them, to the intensities running through them."[31]

Similarly, one needs to remember that, for all of his trenchant critique of philosophy and the history of philosophy, Deleuze is also committed to philosophy, perhaps more than any of those poststructuralists with whom he is sometimes grouped. Deleuze is frequently seen as a thoroughgoing iconoclast, as someone who desires a radical break from traditional ways of thinking, so much so that many readers fail to perceive just how grounded in philosophy and tied to the principles of properly philosophical thought Deleuze really is. This is true of Deleuze's approach to the history of philosophy as well. Although Deleuze certainly recognizes the damage at the institution of the history of philosophy has done to thinking, he does not advocate ignoring that history, ignoring the institution, or getting rid of such practices entirely. Hence, Deleuzian thought is not a rejection or flight from Western philosophy; it is intensely philosophical, immersed in the very tradition with which it grapples. Even when Deleuze ventures into other disciplinary arenas—for example, art history, mathematics, literature, psychoanalysis, and so on—his articulation of

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27 Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic," p. 6.
28 Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, p. 16.
29 Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic," p. 6.
30 See Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *The Final Foucault*, ed. J. Bernauer and D. Rasmussen (Cambridge: The MIT Press. 1988), p. 18.
31 Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic," p. 6.

the problems and his painstaking critiques are profoundly philosophical.[32] Indeed, after his panegyric to the discipline in *What is Philosophy?*, one can hardly doubt that Deleuze–early, middle, and late–is actively *doing* philosophy in his work.

Notwithstanding their sometimes broad titles (e.g., *Nietzsche and Philosophy* or *Bergsonism*), Deleuze's early books selectively engage with the thought of the philosopher in question, addressing concepts that relate to Deleuze's own project. Deleuze's early works are "punctual interventions" into the history of Western philosophy.[33] In describing the "secret" connections between his nomad thinkers, Deleuze offers another meaningful analogy. They are linked in a way similar to the relationships among stars in a constellation, each independent of the others yet also constellated in such a way as to give new meaning to each and to the ensemble or assemblage. "One might say that something happens between them [i.e., these nomad thinkers], at different speeds and with different intensities, which is not in one or other, but truly in an ideal space, which is no longer part of history, still less a dialogue among the dead, but an interstellar conversation, between very irregular stars, whose different becomings form a mobile bloc which it would be a case of capturing, an inter-flight, light-years."[34] Deleuze's nomadography charts these interstellar conversations and casts the history of philosophy in a new light.

Examples of Deleuze's fascinating reconstellation of the history of philosophy are abundant, but I would like to look briefly at his first book, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*. Hume's continuing influence on Deleuze is apparent in his later work, and it is hardly accidental that, in 1986, Deleuze chose to begin his "Preface to the English Language Edition" of *Dialogues* with the words: "I have always felt that I am an empiricist."[35] Deleuze's early work on empiricism not only delineates the fundamentals of Hume's philosophy, but also suggests ways in which Deleuze's later work will develop.[36]

For Deleuze, the empiricism that so often appears as a chapter in the history of philosophy is actually a positive force in thinking today. Hume has traditionally been cast in a transitional role, linking Locke or Berkeley to Kant, who would then manage to correct the excesses of Hume and synthesize the abstract strains of rationalism and empiricism. In Deleuze's nomadography, by contrast, Hume bursts from the narrative of philosophical continuity, resisting facile definitions, and escaping the categorizations imposed by the history of ideas. In a 1989 preface to the English edition of *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Deleuze lists three important concepts that Hume introduced into Western philosophy, and Deleuze's characterization shows just how much he respects the field even as he wishes,

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[32] Hardt recounts, in a footnote, how Deleuze's old professor Ferdinand Alquié, after hearing a presentation by Deleuze, protested that Deleuze had failed to recognize the specificity of "properly philosophical discourse," and, visibly hurt, Deleuze responded that, while his presentation had dealt with other discourses, he followed those very rigorous methods specific to philosophical inquiry which Alquié himself had taught him. See Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze*, p. 124 nt. 3.

[33] Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze*, p. xix.

[34] Deleuze and Parnet *Dialogues*, p. 15–16.

[35] *Ibid.,* p. vii.

[36] See John Sellars, "Gilles Deleuze and the History of Philosophy," *The British Journal for the History of Philosophy* v. 15, n. 3, 2007, p. 551–560; see also my review of *Empiricism and Subjectivity* in *Textual Practice* , v. 7, n. 3, 1993, p. 522–525 (1993).

with Hume's help, to transform it into something completely different. As Deleuze sees it, Hume "established the concept of *belief* and put it in the place of knowledge. [. . .] He gave the *association* of ideas its real meaning, making it a practice of cultural and *conventional* formations (conventional instead of contractual), rather than a theory of human mind"; and "He created the first great logic of *relations*, showing in it that all relations (not only 'matters of fact' but also relations among ideas) are external to their terms."[37] These three concepts not only establish the terrain on which his theory of empirical subjectivity will emerge, but also allow us to imagine a history of philosophy that escapes the Hegelian forest-and-trees imagery altogether.

Deleuze insists that empiricism not be confused with a theory of knowledge. Historians of philosophy tend to identify empiricism as the philosophical mode by which knowledge in the form of ideas is obtained through sensuous experience. But Deleuze argues that this epistemological view misses the point. Empiricism is, above all, a practical philosophy, in which questions of knowledge and truth are always ancillary to and activated by material concerns. Belief, which exerts its power in our lives whether we have true knowledge or not, thus becomes more significant. Through belief, the subject comes to constitute itself within the mind. Deleuze affirms, with Hume, that the mind is not all the same as the subject. The mind is a collection of sense impressions, a "given" without order, "a flux of perceptions" which must be organized in order for the subject to develop. *Association* allows the mind becomes systematized under the influence of its principles, such as contiguity, causality, and resemblance. For example, "the principle of resemblance designates certain ideas that are similar, and makes it possible to group them together under the same name." The mind is thus affected by the principles, which give it a tendency or habit. As Deleuze puts it, "the mind is not a subject; it is subjected."[38]

Once the mind becomes a system and the given has been organized, it is possible for subject to constitute itself as that which transcends the given. Deleuze explains that "I affirm more than I know; my judgment goes beyond the idea. In other words, *I am a subject*." Through *belief*, we are able to transcend the given ("I believe in what I have never seen nor touched"), and this establishes a *relation* (which is not given) among ideas (which are given). For instance, we have ideas of the sun, of rising, and the temporality, yet the belief that the sun will rise tomorrow is a relation among these ideas.[39] The basic function of the subject is to establish relations, which are in all cases external to their terms. Deleuze considers this the absolute fact of empiricism, Hume's as well as his own. A given object or idea does not have an inherent relation to another. For example, since resemblance is a relation, two things that resemble one another might seem to have a *property* of resemblance, but Hume would say that resemblance is merely a *relation* entirely external to the things themselves, since resemblance only arises "from the comparison that the mind makes betwixt them."[40] Hence, a relation-establishing subject is needed to create relations, since the ideas are not themselves endowed with a property which would establish an *a priori* relationship.

Empirical subjectivity is thus a dynamic process rather than a fixed identity. As Deleuze puts it, "subjectivity is essentially *practical*." To ask whether the subject is active or

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[37] Deleuze, *Empiricism*, p. ix–x.
[38] Ibid., p. 23, 114, 31.
[39] Ibid., p. 28, 24.
[40] Quoted in Deleuze, *Empiricism*, p. 99.

passive, as the history of philosophy has traditionally done in characterizing an "active" subject of rationalism and a "passive" subject of empiricism, is to raise what Bergson would have called a "false question." Deleuze explains that "the subject is an imprint, or an impression, left by the principles, that progressively turns into a machine capable of using this impression."[41] The empirical, practical subject constitutes itself on the plane of immanence, and it is recognizable in its function rather than its discrete or abstract existence. Already in *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, the subject unfolds like some rhizomatic machine. Deleuze's conclusion hints at the future directions of his thought even as it foregrounds Hume's own theory: "Philosophy must constitute itself as the theory of what we are doing, not as a theory of what there is."[42]

It may seem a bit churlish to quote the concluding remarks of Deleuze's earliest monograph as an example of his lifelong approach to the history of philosophy, but it seems to me that the very "early" Deleuze of *Empiricism and Subjectivity* is already onto something. In establishing Hume's theory of human nature, Deleuze invites us to revisit those apparently settled problems of philosophy, to see them again with fresh eyes, to think them again with intellects now freed from the categories that had shaped or limited our thoughts. Indeed, Deleuze's retrospective view of Hume in the Preface to the English Edition of his first book—like Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return, it is a *return with difference*—might serve as a model for Deleuze's nomadography: Deleuze also establishes belief and makes it superior to knowledge, understands association of ideas to be conventional, and embraces a logic of relations that are external to their terms. In his unique reconstellation of the institution, Deleuze figures forth a practical history of philosophy, allowing his own belief in his nomads (rather than the knowledge of the granite citadels of philosophy) to guide him, making associations between their ideas that are at once strikingly original and seem almost natural (as if Spinoza were really a Nietzschean all along), and establishing relations among these diverse and motley figures, and between them and himself, and between all of them and us. In Deleuze's re-imagined history of philosophy we see something like that bizarre "subterranean *Ethics*" that Deleuze finds in Spinoza's *scholia*, "discontinuously, independently, referring to one another, violently erupting to form a zigzagging volcanic chain."[43] Deleuze's nomads are like that, sudden and bewildering eruptions of "joyful wisdom" in an apparent continuum of stable meanings, standard commentaries, settled thought. The early Deleuze, playing around behind these thinkers, discovered a new way of doing philosophy. In any case, Deleuze's nomadography makes the history of philosophy a whole lot more interesting.

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[41] Ibid., p. 112–113.
[42] Ibid., p. 133.
[43] Deleuze, "Letter to Reda Bensmaïa, on Spinoza," in *Negotiations*, p. 165; see also Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, p. 337–350; the term "subterranean *Ethics*" appears in Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, p. 29.