

The Oedipal Bacillus: Contagion and Paranoia

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In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari at a few different occasions draw attention to the *contagious* nature of what they we might refer to as the anti-productive affective states or tendencies. These affective tendencies arise when the activity of the unconscious, which they see as inherently productive, is stalled or inhibited. For Deleuze and Guattari, these anti-productive affective states include depression, guilt, bad conscience, neurosis, *ressentiment*, but also paranoia, which they establish as the fundamental anti-productive tendency of the capitalist social formation. They maintain that these anti-productive tendencies are contagious as the ways of thinking and acting they instigate engender the same kind of affective inclinations in others. While Deleuze and Guattari frequently point to the viral character of anti-productive affects, they never fully draw out the nature of this virality. The aim of my paper is to develop this theory of contagion with regard to paranoia, a libidinal tendency seeks to establish order and police it, one that Deleuze and Guattari see as escalating under capitalism. By engaging with different supporting texts and authors, I will explicate the logic of this contagion and elucidate its mechanism of operation. This will first require a clarification of some of Deleuze and Guattari's key concepts and their unfolding in the contemporary social organization.

The most prominent reference to contagion in *Anti-Oedipus* relates to its central object of critique, namely psychoanalysis. D&G claim that the psychoanalytic practice itself generates anti-productive tendencies by participating in the repression, or *oedipalization*, of productive desire. They associate psychoanalysis with

the hatred of life and of all that is free, of all that passes and flows; depression and guilt used as a means of contagion, the kiss of the Vampire: aren't you

ashamed to be happy? follow my example, I won't let go before you say, "It's my fault".¹

While the passage echoes the maneuvers of Nietzsche's ascetic priest, which I will return to later, the dissemination of guilt that D&G accuse psychoanalysis of can be best understood in relation to Oedipus complex. For psychoanalysis, Oedipus complex consists of incestuous drives, the sexual desire for the parent of opposite sex that we allegedly experience as children, but D&G give it a more general meaning. They understand Oedipus as any unconscious formation that uses 'energy to stop up the energy source'.² For them, Oedipus is an anti-productive formation that involves productive desire invested in containing or repressing desiring-production itself. From D&G's perspective, the psychoanalytic idea of Oedipus complex is repressive because it prescribes objects to desire (desire for mommy, or hatred for daddy) and thus directs it in particular way. Yet, D&G suggest that the unconscious desire has no objects or aims: it is a pure process that seeks nothing but to continue proliferating itself. By assigning it an object, psychoanalysis, therefore, restrains desire's productive capacities. 'By placing the distorting mirror of incest before desire', they suggest, 'desire is shamed, stupefied, it is placed in a situation without exit'.³

The idea of Oedipus complex can also help us explain the investment of paranoid type. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that 'Oedipus is a dependency of the paranoiac territoriality'.⁴ For them, paranoiac tendencies arise when desire invests a particular territoriality (i.e. an object) and jealously guard its limits. 'What individuals cling to', suggests Lapoujade,

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 268.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. by Carol Diethe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 76.

³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 120.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

is the limit that they mark out, that is, the limit that territorializes them. "From now on, it's my home, it's mine ..." The limit must preserve an identity of unalloyed purity, protect its territorialities from foreign infiltrations or invisible spies; it must shield a healthy body from microbes and filth. The paranoid is the guardian of limits.⁵

In order to protect the invested territorialities and thus maintain its identity, paranoid desire has to turn against itself and suppress its own proliferation, which would effectively bring about its transformation into something else. Since psychoanalytic practice presupposes the existence of Oedipal Complex, D&G maintain that it binds the productive unconscious to the familial territorialities, and thus infects it with paranoid tendencies.

While D&G suggest that psychoanalysis propagates paranoiac tendencies, they make it clear that psychoanalysis is not the root of the problem. '[W]e have never dreamed of saying that psychoanalysis invented Oedipus,' they propose.⁶ 'Everything points in the opposite direction: the subjects of psychoanalysis arrive already oedipalized, they demand it, they want more'.⁷ Looking for means of controlling their productive desire and strengthening its repression, paranoid subjects seek out psychoanalytic treatment, which merely develops their investments and 'give[s them] a marketable medical form'.⁸ To be receptive for infection with paranoia, then, a prior oedipalization is required. This initial repression, which affects us all, follows from our social organization, which D&G call 'the civilized capitalist machine'. They isolate its two central features in (1) nuclear family as the central reproductive unit and (2) organization of social production *via* market economy.

⁵ David Lapoujade, *Aberrant Movements: The Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2014), p. 191.

⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 121.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

For D&G, the institution of family is a repressive vector that shapes us from the moment we are born. They suggest that family is assigned with a special function under capitalism. Unlike pre-capitalist social formations that incorporated childrearing into communal and political life, the capitalist social formation isolates human reproduction from the social field and privatizes it in the family. In the nuclear family a child's possibilities for forming productive connections are severely restricted. For this reason, D&G see as capitalist family as a stuffy, miasmatic affair. Surrounded mostly by its parents and siblings, his or her productive unconscious can be related to a very limited range of objects. Moreover, due to the prohibition of incest, which shames the essentially object-less desiring-production, these familial territorialities (mommy, daddy, brother, sister) are off limit.

D&G imagine the boundaries of these familial territorialities being policed by a paranoid father, with the incest prohibition on his mind. It is only in the act of forbidding access to these territorialities that they are constructed as the object of child's desire. Child's desire-production is thus channeled, or oedipalized, by having been given an incestuous object. The threatening prohibition of paranoid father eventually results in the renunciation of Oedipal desires by means of internalizing the paternal authority. In this way, desire is turned against itself, and starts to police itself, or, as D&G put it, it comes to 'desire its own repression'.⁹ As a desire for submission, this paranoid desire is a docile form of desire, one that is, in D&G's words, 'all warm for punishment'.¹⁰ By forming a desire that seeks ways to repress itself, isolated capitalist family infects us with paranoia. It sets in motion the paranoid tendencies, which compel our behavior throughout our adult lives.

D&G maintain that these family-generated tendencies in turn intersect with the libidinal dynamics of capitalist market. For them, the operations of the capitalist

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

economy consist of a two-fold movement. On the one hand, realization of profit demands mobilization of resources (of bodies, but also machines, capital, know-how etc.) and leads to their consequent displacement. To organize production, capital continually extracts laboring bodies from their cultural environments defined by their traditions, norms, and hierarchies of value. 'Constant revolutionizing of production', as Marx and Engels say, '[melts a]ll fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions [into air]'.¹¹ This process frees desiring connections from the previously invested territorialities, and allows for the formation of new affective connections, experiences, and desires. Yet, in the same movement, capitalist dynamics immediately reinserts laboring bodies in different exploitative constellations and seeks to re-capture and contain their productive energies. Capitalism, D&G suggest, 'produces an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy or charge, against which it brings all its vast powers of repression to bear'.¹²

These repressive forces of capitalism seek to channel desiring-production by binding it to different kind of territorialities. D&G suggest that capitalism, while disrupting and thus demystifying and denaturalising all traditional forms of authority, still finds use for these archaisms.

Capitalism [...] restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities, thereby attempting [...] to rechannel persons who have been [as wage labourers] defined in terms of abstract quantities. Everything returns [...]: States, nations, families. That is what makes the ideology of capitalism "a motley painting of everything that has ever been believed."¹³

¹¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, on *Marxists Internet Archive* <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>>

¹² Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 34.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Unable to produce a belief system that will apply to the whole social field, capitalism offers fragmented and artificial ideologies and objects of investment, which cover over the strictly meaningless calculations of the market. These folkloric territorialities include ideals of citizenship and liberal democracy, Gods and religions, family values and humanist moralities, but also various forms of radical nationalisms. Additionally, to channel our desires into the domain of work and consumption, various motivational schemes for employees, start-up initiatives, trends and life-style codes, are mobilised.¹⁴

Like the Oedipal territoriality constructed by psychoanalysis, these territorialities provide paranoid tendencies with an outlet for restricting itself. The docile desire finds means of repressing itself by investing a particular territoriality and anxiously policing its borders. The more forcefully desire invests a territoriality and strives to maintain the purity of its identity, the more paranoidly it guards its borders. The more Nazis try to become pure Germans, for example, the more they feel contaminated by what they are not ('the Jews'). Paranoia, therefore, has a propensity to escalate and intensify if the familial repressive wound is further infected. The escalation of paranoia is, furthermore, a tendency of the capitalist formation itself as the latter requires continual growth in production (M-C-M' is an upward spiral). This leads to a continual intensification of disruptiveness of capitalist forces and, consequently, of paranoia.

Having explained the macro-perspective of the production of paranoia under capitalism, we can now zoom in on its mechanism of transmission operating on the interpersonal level. To examine this virality of paranoid tendencies, I draw on

¹⁴ It should be noted that Deleuze and Guattari term the repression of desire that proceeds with recourse to the contents of consciousness 'social repression' (which should be distinguished from 'psychic repression', which operates in an unconscious manner, and which is the type of repression performed by the family). In this case, the anti-productive formations in the unconscious are formed as 'consciousness applies pressure and strait-jackets the unconscious, to prevent its escape'.

Deleuze's account of Nietzsche. In particular, I engage with his conceptualization of the triumph of slaves, which in his view takes place precisely due to forces of contagion. For Nietzsche, the development of humanity was largely determined by the outcome of primordial conflict between 'noble' masters and 'base' slaves. The masters are physically strong and their productive unconscious uninhibited, which is why they lead a life of immediate gratification of their drives. Slaves, on the other hand, are weak, unable to assert themselves and thus at the mercy of the potentially aggressive masters. Yet, Nietzsche maintains that the weak slaves manage to overthrow the noble masters (which has devastating effects for the fate of humanity). The slaves, who outnumber the masters, do not overpower their enemies by joining forces and becoming stronger, but by making the masters weaker.

According to Deleuze's idiosyncratic reading, 'slaves triumph not because of the composition of their power but because of the power of their contagion'.¹⁵ This power of contagion is linked to their morality, which Nietzsche terms *the morality of compassion*. In opposition to the noble morality of masters, which values joyful self-affirmation, the morality of compassion condemns any form of aggression and promotes selflessness. This morality renders the impotence of slaves, their inability for desiring-production, as their own willed achievement, and allows them to represent themselves as good, honorable and moral beings. Deleuze suggests that this morality, which arises out of resentment against joyful masters,

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, 'Nietzsche', *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2005), p. 66.

In his essay 'Nietzsche' Deleuze distinguishes between three different stages of slave triumph. The two stages that for Deleuze involve contagion are the initial two. The first stage is that of Judaic religion and its *ressentiment*, which should be seen as the motor of contagion. The second stage corresponds to Christianity, which is characterized by bad conscience and pity, the two main effects of contagion. (Bad conscience and pity are, then, the affects that are circulated by contagion, while *ressentiment* is the affect that fuels the contagion.) In this essay I discuss contagion in terms of the anti-productive affect that is central to Anti-Oedipus, i.e. the paranoia of slaves as the cause of contagion and the paranoia of masters as its effect).

is inseparable from a ghastly invitation, from a temptation and from a will to spread an infection. It hides its hatred under a tempting love: I who accuse you, it is for your own good; I love you in order that you will join me, until you are joined with me, until you yourself become a painful, sick, reactive being, a good being.¹⁶

Deleuze maintains that the slaves condemn the instinctive joys of the masters (their unrestrained desiring-production) as deeply immoral while offering an ideal of benevolent morality. Like psychoanalysis with Oedipal desires, the slaves in this way construct a territoriality with which they aim to capture the unconscious desire of masters. Deleuze and Guattari suggests that this capture, or infection, consists of crushing of pre-personal 'singularities' (i.e. the operators of the productive unconscious) by subordinating them to the constructed territoriality.¹⁷ By investing the territoriality marked out by slave morality, the desire of masters comes to paranoically repress itself by shutting off every singularity productive of what is deemed as 'immoral' behavior. Instead of singularities schizophrenically forming desiring connections with whatever they can produce with, the activity of unconscious is stalled by being given an aim ('being moral').

As already noted, D&G make it clear that '[d]esire does not lack [...] its object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire'.¹⁸ For them, 'there is no fixed subject unless there is repression'.¹⁹ Repressing desire by binding it to the said territoriality is exactly what gives masters a conscious intention to act in accordance with the values prescribed by morality of compassion.²⁰ Once infected with the desire to be moral,

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 128.

¹⁷ In this way, 'the vacuoles of lack' in the unconscious are constituted: what masters now lack is the morality of compassion. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 343).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ 'For what really takes place is that the law prohibits something that is perfectly fictitious in the order of desire or of the "instincts," so as to persuade its subjects that they had the intention corresponding

desiring-production is internalized in terms of representation. Put differently, desire no longer seeks to produce, but it rather becomes a desire to be favorably represented. In this way, masters end up pursuing the recognition of identity 'freely' offered by the slaves. It is this paranoiac investment of this identity that stalls the productive joys of a noble master, who ends up becoming 'a painful, sick, reactive being, *a good being*'.²¹

Lastly, the morality of compassion, or 'herd morality', allows us to examine how the infection with Oedipal bacillus relates to 'the law of large numbers'. Building on an insight from Darwin, Nietzsche suggests that, like natural selection, the forces of cultural selection too work in favour of large numbers. According to him, herd morality is an outcome of such selection as it protects the slavish masses by neutralizing the threatening masters. D&G draw on this insight to suggest that gregarious territorialities (like herd morality) 'are born out of this selective pressure that crushes, eliminates, or regularizes the singularities. [...] "Culture" as a selective process of marking or inscription invents the large numbers in whose favour it is exerted'.²² For D&G, then, the forces of culture regularize singularities so as to form gregarious territorialities, which safeguard the survival of statistical majorities. The more significant a particular territoriality is for the benefit of the masses, the more potent are its infectious powers, and more likely it is to capture our desires in paranoid loops. In short, conformity, too, can be said to function virally.

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I am a researcher and teacher in philosophy and sociology located in Cardiff, Wales. My main area of expertise are theories of affective materialism put forward by thinkers such as Spinoza, Nietzsche, Freud, Deleuze and Guattari, and others. I draw on these theories to explore political and ethical aspects of contagion, addiction and other affective phenomena. I completed my AHRC-funded PhD in Critical and

to this fiction. This is indeed the only way the law has of getting a grip on intention, of making the unconscious guilty'.

²¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p. 44.

²² Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 342.

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