

Gilles Deleuze – The Deleuze Seminars (deleuze.cla.purdue.edu), summaries: Charles J. Stivale

On *A Thousand Plateaus* III 1977-1978

Only two sets of documents are available corresponding to this academic year, and both pertain somewhat indirectly to *A Thousand Plateaus*. The first set consists of two lectures, one from the Vincennes seminar (January 24, 1978) on affect and idea in Spinoza, the other a lecture that Deleuze delivered a month later at a colloquium on Pierre Boulez at IRCAM. Whereas the latter has been published in an edited version in *Two Regimes of Madness* (2006, “Making Inaudible Forces Audible”, pp. 156-160), the first session is easily situated at the start of the Spinoza seminar (1980-1981).

However, despite this obvious linkage, Deleuze will raise the topic of continuous variation during the 1979-80 seminar in reference to discussions from earlier years, no doubt including this one. By referring to *A Thousand Plateaus*, one notes the importance of continuous variation for the very definition of “plateau” (cf. Rhizome introduction), for expression and style (plateaus 4-5), for becoming and the refrain (plateaus 10-11), and for the discussion of the State apparatus, apparatus of capture, and smooth space (plateaus 12-13-14). Hence, this session holds an important place in relation to the missing sessions of the three final seminars on *A Thousand Plateaus*.

***A Thousand Plateaus* III**

Session 1, January 24, 1978 – Affect and Idea

Deleuze pauses in his discussion of continuous variation (during the development of *A Thousand Plateaus*) to bring up a related question: what is an idea and affect in Spinoza? Given Spinoza’s important place in *A Thousand Plateaus* (cf. plateau 10 on becoming), this shift does not entirely constitute a detour. Referring primarily to books II and III of the *Ethics*, Deleuze’s approach is deliberately terminological, first distinguishing between the Latin terms *affectio* and *affectus*, “affect” corresponding to the latter, *affectus*, whereas “affection” (*sentiment*, feeling) corresponding to *affectio*. As for “idea”, for Spinoza this is simply a mode of thought which represents something, the objective reality, while in contrast, affect is any mode of thought which does not represent anything, non-representational, but with a primacy of the idea over the affect. Whereas our everyday life is not made up solely of ideas succeeding each other, a regime of continuous variation operates perpetually, a force of existing (*vis existendi*) or power (*puissance*) of action (*potentia agendi*). This continuous variation for Spinoza means to exist, one’s power of acting increasing or decreasing, rendering more or less joy depending on the extent to which the power of acting is inhibited or enhanced, with continuous variation occurring in this ongoing process of increase-diminution. In terms of ideas, one never ceases passing from one degree of perfection to another, a melodic line of continuous variation defining affect as it connects to ideas as well as in its distinction from ideas. For Spinoza, there are three sorts of ideas: affection (*affectio*) ideas (opposed to *affectus*); notions; and essence ideas, each corresponding to a different level of knowledge. The affection-idea is a first kind of knowledge (*connaissance*), the lowest kind, i.e. knowledge of things only by their effects, i.e., “inadequate ideas” or representations of effects without their causes. Deleuze shifts toward Spinoza’s next level, ethics as a problem of power (*puissance*), not duty, and of notion-ideas where escape

occurs from the world of passions, no longer the mixture of two bodies, but rather the internal agreement or disagreement of the characteristic relations of the two bodies. By striving to experience affects of joy as a springboard that makes us form the idea of what is common, joyful, to the affecting body and the affected body, leading to greater intelligence. At the third level, there are singular essences, the essence-idea as passage to the world of essence, knowledge of one's singular essence and God's singular essence and the singular essence of things. And in this third kind of knowledge, all bodies agree with each other in a world of pure intensities, a mystical point of beatitude or active affect, or auto-affect.