

Gilles Deleuze

Seminar On *Anti-Oedipus I*, 1971 – 1972

Lecture 06, February 15, 1972

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**Libido and labor as subjective activities and their re-alienation – psychoanalysis and myth
– bodies without organs and intensities**

... It would be a disaster if I came up with a theory of the unconscious. For me, it's really a practical problem: how does the unconscious function? And what I'm saying is that the way it works has never been about Oedipus, about castration or the death drive; I'm say all that gets introduced by psychoanalysis. There's a process that makes psychoanalysis fundamentally a part of capitalism—and again, I don't mean ideologically; I strictly mean in terms of practice. When Marx asks, "What lies at the root of political economy?"—a problem Foucault revisits in *The Order of Things*—Marx's answer is that political economy really begins with Adam Smith and Ricardo because before them, to understand the nature of wealth, one looked at what we could call the object, objectivity [*objectité*]. At which point we didn't have political economy; we had something else, an analysis of wealth. The nature of wealth was bound up with major objectivities—the land, for physiocrats; the state, for mercantilists.¹

What's going on with this major revolution in political economy at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century with Smith and Ricardo? Marx says it best: with the development of capitalism, one no longer looked for the nature of wealth in terms of objectivities but, in a radical about-face—a sort of Kantian transformation at the level of political economy—it came back to the subject. Back to the subject, what does that mean? Smith and Ricardo, he says, did what Luther did in the world of religion: instead of tying religiosity to major objectivities, they turned it around in order to relate it to the subject, to subjective faith. Ricardo locates the nature or essence of wealth alongside the subject as a productive activity, as an act of production, any act whatsoever. Hence Marx's beautiful turn of phrase: "It was an immense step forward for Adam Smith to attribute the essence of wealth to productive activity in general, without privileging any form of production over another. Agricultural production was no longer privileged. And it took the conditions of industrial labor, that is, the development of capitalism, for the nature of wealth to be turned around and be revealed to belong to productive activity in general, for the essence of wealth to prop up this conversion and be discovered on the side of general productive activity, and it is on that basis that political economic was founded."²

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault revisits this in another form, looking for what constituted the birth of political economy. With A. Smith and Ricardo, we found in the subjective act of production something irreducible to the domain of representation. It's rather clear this epistemological change transforming the domain of knowledge, steering towards a knowledge bearing on the non-representative: productive activity insofar as it subtends, passes through representation.³

What does Freud do? Before, the insane were linked to major objectivities—the madman of the earth, the madman of the despot. The same goes for wealth; wealth referred back to objective entities. 19th century psychiatry undergoes a rather similar transformation to what Ricardo undertook with political economy. This transformation takes off, that is, madness is no longer linked to great objectivities, but to a general subjective activity. What activity? Things break loose with Freud, which is why the divide isn't between Freud and 19th century psychiatry. Freud—just like the major reversal whereby Ricardo discovers the abstract nature of wealth, by no longer relating wealth to objectivities but to a general, unqualified act of production, which allows him to discover abstract labor.

Freud does the same thing. Freud is Ricardo; he's Smith; he's the Ricardo of psychiatry. He discovers the abstract nature of desire, and it's no longer alongside major objectivities—the madman of the earth or the madman of the despot. He finds it in the subjective activity of desire. He calls this subjective activity, or abstract essence, the “libido”—and this libido will have goals, sources, and objects. But Freud recognizes that the libido is more than its goals, sources, and objects. These objects, sources, and goals are still ways of attributing desire to objectivities, to territories. On a deeper level, the libido is a subjective activity of desire. From that angle, Freud and Ricardo are the same. Their similarities don't stop there; it goes even further.

Marx has more to say: he says that they revealed the essence of wealth as the general activity of production, and they call such general productive activity “abstract labor.” The Freudian equivalent is only a few steps away: he uncovers the general activity of desire, and his name for it is abstract libido. But, but, but—the similarities go further, because then, both Freud and Ricardo do something funny. Marx puts it well: “But as soon as Ricardo identifies the essence of wealth as productive activity in general, he keeps re-alienating it.”⁴ What does that mean? There's no more objectivity; that's a given. But this productive activity will be alienated all over again. Does that mean Ricardo is reinstating big, objective representations and retreating to previous alienations? No. It comes down to inventing a sort of mystification for what they just discovered. Namely, Marx tells us, whereas before, wealth and labor were alienated in objectivities, i.e., as states (as in a state of affairs), now they take on a new form of alienation, to wit, a specifically subjective alienation corresponding to their subjective discovery. They get alienated as activities rather than as states, rather than alienating as an objective state of affairs. They're alienated as a subjective act, lining up with what they've revealed to be a subjective essence. Marx spells it out: from there, alienation will no longer be understood as and limited to an objective state of affairs; it will be grasped in its very act. What act? They'll alienate labor again, as the subjective essence of production; they'll re-alienate it under the conditions of private property.

Freud discovers the abstract libido, it sparks huge transformation: desire must no longer be understood in terms of its objects, nor in terms of its goals. It ought to be understood as libido. But Freud re-alienates this discovery on a new basis, corresponding to his own discovery; the new basis for the alienation of the subjective activity of desire, understood as libido, is under the subjective conditions of the family, which leads to Oedipus. Psychoanalysis is a sub-set of capitalism, which is why, in certain respects, all of capitalism is folded into psychoanalysis. In what sense? Ricardo says, “Alright, boys—I've discovered productive activity in general, but look out: private property ought to be the measure for this general productive activity, the

essence of which I've attributed to the subject." And Freud does much the same: we don't get out of the family.

Why is it that way? Why couldn't it be otherwise? Why is that fundamentally a part of both psychoanalysis and capitalism? There are two movements that always co-exist within capitalism. On the one hand, [you have] the decoding and deterritorialization of flows, the subjective activity that's been uncovered. But at the same time, things constantly reterritorialize, neo-territorialize. Despite appearances, that doesn't consist in resurrecting the body of the earth as an objectivity, nor the body of the despot as an objectivity, except at a local level. There is local despotism, but that's not what this is. Reterritorialization doesn't just mean resurrecting pure archaisms, i.e., bygone objectivities; reterritorialization should be subjective. On the one hand, it first takes place under the conditions of private property, which is political economy, and a second time in the modern subjective family, which is psychoanalysis. It needs both. What's come about is the process of reterritorializing abstract activity.

In this respect, psychoanalysis is as much a part of capitalism as merchants, bankers, industrialists. It plays an incredibly precise role in capitalist economies. If there's any justification for the peculiar exchange of money in psychoanalysis—because everyone jokes about the justifications for money and how it fits into psychoanalysis—it's great because it works, and at the same time, no one believes it. But you don't have to believe in it. It's like in capitalism: you don't have to believe in anything anymore. Codes need belief—absolutely not so with axiomatics; who cares?

The way money is exchanged in psychoanalysis is a lesser version of what we find in capitalism. The whole capitalist machine operates thanks to money's being double-sided: as financial flows and payment flows. They're completely different flows, and both are folded into money; the incommensurability of these flows is a necessary condition for the capitalist machine to function. In psychoanalysis, there's a financing flow and a payment flow, and ultimately the psychoanalytic machine works thanks to both flows, whose dualism is concealed.

For example, say a woman goes in for analysis. In many cases, the analyst will have no trouble revealing conflicts with her husband, and at the same time, the husband is the one paying for the analysis. In which case, the financing flow that stems from the husband, the payment that goes from the woman to her analyst—how do you expect her to get out? The analyst is blissfully indifferent to where the money comes from; when it comes time to justify his fees, the question "Who's paying?" never arises. It's a funny sort of loop where, literally, it's just like the back-and-forth of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

I'm thinking about the psychoanalytic attitude towards myth and tragedy, because in the end, it's no coincidence that they turned to Oedipus. Did old Freud discover the Oedipus complex in his self-analysis, as everyone says, or did he find it in his culture? His culture was Goethean. He likes Goethe, he reads him at night. Is he pulling it from Sophocles or from his self-analysis?

A capitalist regime doesn't require anyone to believe. What is required of them? Something that applies to capitalism as much as it does to the Roman empire, which Nietzsche captured so definitively in his depiction of people of the time, in what he calls a "motley painting of

everything that has ever been believed”—everything that’s been the subject of belief is fit for reterritorializing. Like the Romans: we’ll take your God and set him up in Rome, so you get reterritorialized onto Roman land. Capitalism, too: over there is a feathered serpent—very well, the serpent’s coming with us.⁵

What about psychoanalysis’s peculiar attitude towards myth? There’s an article by [Didier] Anzieu on the subject.⁶ He says there are stages. It’s smooth sailing at first—all myths get analyzed; every myth, every tragedy gets thoroughly picked apart. And then that falls out of fashion; that’s what Jung does, so we don’t want to get mixed up with him. Why weren’t they ever included with ethnologists or Hellenists? There’s a reason for such immense ambiguity, such an immense misunderstanding.

Student: And Lévi-Strauss—we have to explain how all myth analysis is picked up again after Freud, and any analysis of kinship is based on a kinship atom that determines the entire system of possible kinship, and this kinship atom is the [*audio unclear—perhaps “symbol”*] with a fourth term of either the brother or mother, which gets taken up by analysts like [M.C. and Edmond] Ortigues, claiming they’ve understood this fourth term to be symbolic. Lévi-Strauss is the one—which is why Lacan agrees with him on a bunch of points—the one who analyzed myth, and analysts don’t have to do it anymore.⁷

Deleuze: Then we should say it happens three times: there’s what Ricardo does in economics, what Freud does in psychiatry, and what Lévi-Strauss does in ethnology. Are we dissolving imaginary variations of the Oedipus complex while nevertheless maintaining a structure preserving the law-prohibition-transgression trinity? Oedipus isn’t preserved in the form of an abstract disfiguration.

Student: Lévi-Strauss starts dismantling Oedipus by demonstrating that the story isn’t what matters; he analyzes it in order to then generalize its structure, through the structure of the kinship atom.

Deleuze: Hmmm, hmmm. He discovered what he took to be ethnology’s most basic subjective activity, the prohibition of incest, and he re-alienated or folded it over into the kinship system.

Lastly: ethnologists and Hellenists are profoundly functionalist when they find themselves working with myth. What they really want to know is “How does this thing work?” And when they explain what a myth or tragedy means, they go about it as historians; they relate it to the objectivities the myths refer to—the objectivity of the earth, for example. And what else can they do, from their rigorous scientific point of view, other than explain, e.g., the role of a myth or oedipal ritual in the context of territorial objectivities, despotic objectivities? Lévi-Strauss on Oedipus, for example. He demonstrates that it simultaneously refers to a perpetuation of autochthony, the fact of territorial objectivity, and to a failure of autochthony, the birth of despotic formations. Myths, tragedies are sent back to their objective references, and they’re right because [the myth, etc.] is about a particular century, a particular Greek city, etc. For them, interpreting myth and tragedy is unintelligible without this systematic framework of historical objectivities.

From the outset, psychoanalysts have never been interested in historical objectivities; what they're trying to do is link myth and tragedy to the libido as a subjective activity, which is reflected in [Karl] Abraham's naïve formulation: "myth dreams of humanity."⁸ In other words, myths are analogous to dreams on a humanity-wide scale. They tie myth to the subjective activity of the libido, accounting for changes in the unconscious and for work done on the unconscious. Hence the rather ambiguous attitude psychoanalysis has towards myth, where one moment, it appeals to myth, and the next, it renounces it. They're the first to ascribe myth and tragedy to the libido as their abstract, subjective essence, but at the same time—why do they keep myth and tragedy? It's unbelievable what it's gone through, [with respect to] understanding myth and tragedy as expressive units of the unconscious. How did they end up screwing around with myth and tragedy? How did they end up defining units of the unconscious in myths and tragedy?

Again, I'm asking from a clinical perspective: when a guy suffering from neurosis—or better yet, suffering from psychosis—Schreber comes along, and Freud says, "See, what he's saying sounds like a myth." Freud didn't find it in his unconscious; he found it in all the bad readings he was feeding on. He thought, "Hang on, doesn't this guy sound like Oedipus?" When a guy comes along, and things aren't going well for him, it makes you feel like there's a whole set of panicked, haywire machines. It's like we're in a garage, in a sabotaged factory where a wrench has suddenly been thrown in the works. Then—*Boom! Bang!*—it goes off all over the place; it's a crazy factory, but it's still a factory, and on top of that, Freud here comes along and says, "It's a theater, it's a myth"—we have to... [text missing]

Cell migration, for example, is when a group of cells cross a threshold. Thresholds are lines of intensity. It's intensive matter before it's an extended biological reality. The unfertilized egg, the non-active egg, is really an intensity = 0. I'm not speaking metaphorically when I say that it's the catatonic body, the catatonic egg. As soon as it's activated—all sorts of trajectories and transitions. Of course, these trajectories and transitions take place in extension, a group of cells migrating across the egg, but what do we find beneath their extensive path, their schizo promenade? There are transitions and becomings of a completely different nature, i.e., transitions and becomings in intensity. And that's why I'm not on board with the anti-psychiatric habit of renouncing medication. Medication has two uses: one possible use for it is "This one's bothering us, we need to calm him down," and calming them down means bringing them as close as possible to zero intensity. There are cases where psychiatrists intervene during an anxiety attack, and stopping it is catastrophic. But medicinal use can mean something else, as in drugs; a real psychiatric pharmacy comes down to ways of activating the egg—i.e., drugs can carry out transitions between one threshold of intensity and another, can guide its trajectory in intensity.

It *does* have a trajectory in extension, an extensive migration, but beneath that there's a trajectory in intensity, i.e., on the body without organs, passing from one gradient to another, from one threshold of intensity to another. And that's not the same thing as delirium or hallucination; it's more fundamental—hallucinations and delirium are only secondary expressions of these intensive transitions. We go from one zone to another—strictly speaking, what does Judge Schreber mean when he says, "I'm growing real breasts"? What could that mean? It isn't a hallucination, but he will have hallucinations based on it. Is it delirium? I don't think so, but he will form delusions from it.⁹

It's the matrix that delusion and hallucination share. The female torso is literally there, on Schreber's body without organs. It transitions, it follows astonishing trajectories—historical, geographical, biological developments—and at this level, again, all the flows mix together: historical flows, geographical flows. Because he only becomes a woman from a historical perspective, hence the necessity of defending Alsace, being a young Alsatian woman defending Alsace against France. Everything's mixed together: the Judge's becoming-woman combines with Alsace's becoming-German again. The becoming-woman that Judge Schreber experiences physically follows a course in intensity. On his body without organs, he's entered the being-woman gradient; he's crossed over, reached another threshold—and these trajectories need to be helped along in extension, generally. Circling back to what I find so interesting about transvestites,¹⁰ they're the ones where this journey, this trajectory, is the least metaphorical; they're the ones who risk and are the most invested in a journey with no turning back—and they know it. You can think about it in terms of extension—they dress like a woman, they take hormones—but beneath that, they pass through thresholds of intensity.

To make sense of all these phenomena, we need to disorganize them, to unravel them, to bracket the reality of something we're all too familiar with—the organism. Because the organism isn't organs in a body. An organism is a coding [*codage*], a combinatorial [*combinatoire*]—the very same way we talk about a genetic code—of organs onto the body without organs. But my question is: as partial objects, do the organs not have a deeper, pre-organic relationship with the body without organs? This deeper, pre-organic relationship seems to entail abandoning any extensional point of view, i.e., organs are no longer territories with certain forms or certain functions. They are degrees of pure intensity. Embryology goes quite some distance in this regard: this gradient outlines the eye, that gradient outlines something else. They are thus intensive powers on the body without organs. But zero intensity is not the opposite of these intensive powers; it is the pure intensive matter that gets filled by intensive powers to one degree or another. That's what I mean when I say that the body without organs and the organs are the same in their common struggle against their organism.

Artaud has done a marvelous job of highlighting that: the true enemy of the body without organs is the organism.¹¹ So, beneath the organism, having bracketed the organism, we can clearly see the relationship between organs as intensive powers that end up filling matter to varying degrees, to the point where, ultimately, the two are the same thing, strictly speaking. The schizophrenic journey or trajectory [*voyage*] is this way of passing through zones, and only subsequently does it take place in extension, in the form of going out on a walk or a journey—and only subsequently are there delusions and hallucinations. But there's a reality beneath the hallucinations and under the delusions—the reality of “I feel.”

Back to the egg. Even before there are determinate organs, it isn't simply undifferentiated—there are distributions in intensity, and these zones of intensity don't at all resemble the organs that will eventually occupy them in extension. What outlines the blueprint for the eye is a gradient. Something happens when a group of cells moves from one area to another; it isn't at all undifferentiated. But beneath this extensive migration, there's a transition from one intensity to another, without organs having any distinct shape yet. Later, out of these migrations, we will be able to make out, in extension, the organs' blueprints, and then the organs.

Student: It isn't enough to say there's a difference between the body without organs and the organism—that's obvious. Something more troubling is the idea that there are processes carried out on the body without organs. There are paranoid sorts of processes of repulsion, and [there is the] schizophrenic sorts of processes. But there's one issue you haven't brought up: if you think there's a life of the unconscious, and that the life of the unconscious comes down to the function of desiring machines, and you tack on "and then" there is the body without organs, as a full, unproductive, and sterile body, you haven't broached the subject of this body's production itself, i.e., how is it that at some point in the life of the unconscious, things take a turn? Where does the body without organs come from? What process produces this full body? For Artaud, an even greater foe than the organism is God, Satan, the great thief. A delirium and an intensity—perhaps it works at the same time. Artaud, for example, literally felt annihilated, dispossessed by God, who robbed him of his life, to the point that Artaud says, "I've carried out a reversion toward the breast-matrix." And to avoid this theft, Artaud initiates this reversal on his body without organs. How is it that such a body is able to come about?

Deleuze: The relationship with God is rather straightforward. What Artaud calls God is the organizer of the organism. The organism is what codes, stifles flows; it's what combines them, what axiomatizes them, and looking at it that way, God is the one who makes an organism from the body without organs. That's what's unbearable for Artaud. Artaud's writing is one of the greatest attempts to channel flows under codes, or through the cracks, whatever those might be—his is the greatest attempt to decode writing. What he calls cruelty is a process of decoding, and when he writes, "all writing is rubbish," what he means is that all codes, all combinatorics inevitably transform a body into an organism, and that's God's doing.

As for your other question: We do need to demonstrate how the body without organs, an unproductive entity, is produced where it is, in its place, within desiring production. I agree, but that's what I did last year. We get our cue from the fact that a similar phenomenon takes place in a social body, namely, what always forms in a social body, based on productive forces, there emerges, or is produced, a sort of full social body, which is unproductive on its own [but] takes credit for productive forces.

The problem isn't fundamentally different with schizophrenia, where it's necessary to show how, based on desiring production, which is connected in every way, an unproductive entity, the body without organs, is produced in the midst of such production. Coming at the problem the way you've presented it: the body without organs must itself be produced in the interplay between productive partial objects/organs; we need to explain how.

Georges Comtesse: You say that the life of the unconscious is that of desiring machines, and if it's desiring machines, it's precisely the "*objet petit a*." Desiring machines have nothing to do with life—they are mortifying machines, fundamentally mortifying.

Deleuze: Why?

Comtesse: Because they're the *objet a*. If we identify them as the *objet a*, they can't be anything other than mortifying machines, and from there, we can understand how the very operation of these mortifying machines could at some point produce a full body.

Deleuze: That's terrible! When I said that desiring machines were the *objet a*, all I meant was that, even in Lacan, a structure can only function if he sneaks in a machinic element, and the *objet a* is ultimately a machinic element, and not a structural one. Since last year, I've tried to argue that Oedipus is absolutely meaningless when it comes to the unconscious. Lacan is the first to say as much, but tragically, he didn't want to say the same for castration. And I'm claiming the same thing regarding castration. Moreover, castration only ever served as a foundation for Oedipus. Last year, I was told that Oedipus was a sort of disastrous, unfortunate code explaining the great misery of psychoanalysis. For castration, it was more difficult.

Comtesse: You don't say what castration is. When someone doesn't say what castration is, I don't see how, on that basis, one could wind it back.

Deleuze: But then, suppose we're only focusing on what I've said about Oedipus, I'm struck by this: if you more or less agree with me on Oedipus and castration, there are some who said: yeah, sure, but watch out for what's around the bend. There's the death drive, and don't think you're going to get rid of that one. As I see it, Oedipus, castration, and the death drive are three forms of sheer mystification, and we haven't gotten anywhere if we reintroduce the death drive. Hence why hearing you describe desiring machines as mortifying fills me with dread—because we'll end up with Oedipus again.

Comtesse: There's not a death cult. It exists, but for psychoanalysts wanting to work, the breakthrough of psychoanalysis is being able to say what about the processes of castration affecting...

Deleuze: You're on the same page, since our problem is this—what psychoanalysis puts the unconscious through: are they [really] processes of the unconscious, or are they artificial processes relayed via one's social field?

Comtesse: There were only positive desiring machines; I don't see how that could produce a full body.

Deleuze: Now, you're saying: you'll never get be able to generate the body without organs without introducing mortifying elements. I hope that's not the case. If the body without organs is a mortifying lump, everything I'm trying to do falls apart.

Subjects come in to be analyzed, with a particular request, Oedipus and castration. They bring it with them; it's not that the analyst introduces it. The question is whether these effects—given the transformations in the work of the unconscious—amount to formations of the unconscious or to completely different kinds of mechanisms, mechanisms whose goal and function is to prevent the formations of the unconscious from functioning? My claim is that psychoanalysts don't invent Oedipus and castration, but the entire analytic procedure consists in short-circuiting the problem: is what the subject brings with them equivalent to their unconscious formations? Obviously, it's sufficient for the analyst—Oedipus and castration are expressions, expressive components of one's unconscious formations. So, it's not that they've invented Oedipus, but in a way, it's worse: [the analyst] confirms [Oedipus and castration] by analytically enshrining them.

A guy brings in Oedipus, and the analyst turns it into an Oedipus of transference, i.e., an Oedipus of Oedipus. A guy brings his castration, and the analyst turns it into a castration of castration. It's just like with abortions: you have an abortion twice—once with the knitting mother and again with a specialist in an aseptized clinic.¹² The guy's been castrated once by family and society. He lies on the couch and is castrated again, brilliantly described as a “successful castration.” We'll succeed where the knitting mother failed. The opposition doesn't at all seem to be between analysts working in the clinic and philosophers working outside of the clinic. I think my main through-line has been: look at how the unconscious functions, and [you'll see that] the unconscious doesn't know anything about Oedipus, castration. All that's what consciousness projects onto the unconscious. I draw the line where analysts are wedded to the material their subjects bring to them, reckoning that, considering the work of the unconscious, [such material] represents the formations of the unconscious itself... [End of session]

Notes

¹ Deleuze and Guattari introduce the term, “objectities,” in *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 301.

² See *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 270-271. The text in question (which Deleuze loosely paraphrases) is from Marx's *Grundrisse*.

³ See *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 299-300.

⁴ The translator cannot find this line in Marx's *Grundrisse*, and so cannot cross-reference Deleuze's wording with the original text.

⁵ See *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 215-217.

⁶ “Freud et la mythologie,” *Incidences de la psychanalyse*, no. 1 (1970), pp. 126-129. See *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 300.

⁷ Deleuze and Guattari seem to have adopted this line of thinking. See *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 157.

⁸ Deleuze cites Abraham here, but—although they repeat this line—he and Guattari do not cite him in *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 362. See Karl Abraham, “Dreams and Myths: A Study in Race Psychology,” in *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham*, trans. Douglas Bryan and Alix Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1909).

⁹ On Schreber and thresholds, gradients, see *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 19.

¹⁰ The term, “transvestite,” has been preserved here, since “transgender” would only later become the more acceptable and encompassing term. Given his reference to hormones, however, it is unlikely that Deleuze only has “cross-dressing” in mind. Note that the original text strictly uses masculine pronouns when discussing transvestites.

¹¹ On Artaud and the body without organs, see *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 7-9, and elsewhere.

¹² Because the revolutionary sense of *tricoteuse* seems unlikely, and because this translator is unfamiliar with Deleuze's reference here, *tricoteuse* and *clinique aseptisée* are translated as “knitting mother” and “asepticized clinic,” following the translation in *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 334.