Gilles Deleuze

Deleuze & Guattari at Vincennes, 1975-76

Il Senso in Meno, Part 4 - The Novel and Courtly Romance, the White Wall Black Hole of Passional Faciality, Demonism of the Negus, Art Brut, Henry Miller, Quanta of Information and Quanta of Possibilities

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[Please note that the transcription follows as exactly as possible the discussion in the filmed seminar, and therefore the translation differs at time with the discussion rendered in the subtitles on the YouTube versions]

Deleuze: ... We had to find a way to break through the white wall or - which amounts to the same thing – to get out of the black hole. It's not easy knowing how to get out of the black hole or how to break through the white wall. So here is a second grouping, not even of notions in this case but of dreams, of fallings asleep.

And to conclude this second part, before I let you speak and tell me what you think, I would just like to say... There's a strange story, a text that I think is wonderful. Here I open a parenthesis, but one that is inherent to the second notion. I number them so things will be clearer when we go back to them.

I know I seem to be going off the subject, but when people speak about the novel, or the history of the novel, there's something that isn't right. Because we're so horrified by origins, by the return to origins, we've got into the habit of beginning from the end. Initially, this was a good thing, when the method worked, but then... We employ the *rhizomatic method*, which is different, we examine things from the middle. That way, we're at no risk of making a mistake. This is the Kafka method, or the ant method. The *rhizome method*. An ant seizes things from the middle. We are ants.

I was talking about the novel and how we had the habit of beginning from the end. We discover, for example, and here I make a concrete example... we experience the end of the novel, or we have experienced it, through a catastrophic text like Camus's *The Stranger*. Or other marvellous novels, like those of Beckett that mark its limit point. The novel is over. Or else we're told... that in a certain epoch there was the chivalric novel. And then that came to an end with the famous *Don Quixote*. *Don Quixote* marked the end of the romances of Chivalry because it's the moment when there is no longer any sense in the figure of the knight, and he can only be embodied by someone like Don Quixote who is completely mad, mistaking windmills for who knows what and so on... It's a well-known story. *Don Quixote* is considered the end of the chivalric novel. [*On the chivalric novel in this context, see* A Thousand Plateaus, *pp. 173-174*]

A student: The horse is no longer a horse.

Deleuze: What?

The student: Above all, the horse is no longer just a horse.

Deleuze: Yes, yes, yes. Yes, it becomes more important. And these endings, to what do we attribute them? They are attributed when, and here again I roughly sum up, we are shown the hero to be a poor guy who is completely lost. What I'm saying is: of course there is an evolution of the novel — I'm not saying the novel has always remained the same - but if there is such an evolution then this is

certainly not what it focuses on. Because the appearance of a character who is completely... I can't think of a better term... completely *lost*, who doesn't know what he's doing, who doesn't know his own name even, who is a stranger to everything, who is completely deterritorialized, who wanders along his line of flight understanding nothing, who stops, and when he's not on his line of flight becomes completely catatonic, you see here what psychiatry defines as catatonic, a person who remains for hours on end in a movement that can be quite intricate, involving all the muscles, and who spends maybe 6 hours, 24 hours in this state. So then...

A student: Are many of these people around?

Deleuze: Not many of them are around, unfortunately, because the psychiatric hospitals were demolished, but at the time when there were psychiatric hospitals, you could see a lot of them about. You could see a lot of them! [Laughter, unclear for what reason] Whereas now, you see people lying on couches, [Laughter] in comparison, the catatonics were much more active. So anyway...

The student: But some of the shrinks fucking their patients!

Deleuze: Catatonics?

The student: No.

Deleuze: Ah... the others! It's possible. Though the idea disturbs me... So, I was saying. This was the inauguration of the novel. This is it. If I have to define the novel, I'd say that it appears at the moment a certain type of character emerges. And if someone said to me, "but your definition of the novel is based on characters, that's not the way to proceed, it's the signifier that counts", that just makes me laugh. The novel appears with a certain type of character who has no idea of his own name, of what he is doing, who is a complete idiot, utterly lost, completely just standing there and looking. And what is he looking at? He doesn't even know. Someone comes up and taps him on the shoulder.

I'd say that the real Albert Camus is Chrétien de Troyes. He's the first great novelist. And the line runs from Chrétien de Troyes to Beckett who, it should be said, knows the Middle Ages well, all the Celtic novels and the romances of courtly love. And what do we find when we open a courtly romance? A romance of the courtly love cycles, or of Chrétien de Troyes. I'm not even going to read a passage because it would be too long, and you can find them in paperback editions. If you haven't read them, buy them. They are wonderful.

For example, you'll find a knight, who's just there sitting on his horse. In the distance is a peasant who says: "Look, do you see him? A knight asleep on his horse!" But for him this is nothing exceptional. In fact, that's how he recognizes it's a knight. "It's a knight, do you see him?" He's leaning on his lance like this. And he's fast asleep. He sleeps on. And then another knight comes along. They have brief waking periods... [Laughter] He arrives on his errant line, his line of deterritorialization. Or else, the knight who has fallen into a catatonic state and is asleep finds himself in the territory of another knight, who suddenly awakens. And the awakened knight says: "Don't move!" There's no danger of him moving in his state. "Don't move! You hear me?" The other knight hears nothing. There's a second and then a third call. The three summations of chivalry... On the third call, the conscious knight says: "You have gravely offended me. You don't answer me." And he whacks him over the head with his lance or with his broadsword. The other is astonished, the sleeping, catatonic knight wakes up. "Hey what's this? You hit me!"

For those who don't believe me, I'll just read you a short extract: "You hit me!" "Three times I

addressed you and you made no answer!" "Had you spoken to me, I would have heard you. I didn't hear anything" "Too bad. You offended me in any case. We must fight!" "Why must we fight?" "I've no idea..."

The search for the Holy Grail is wonderful: they don't know what they are looking for. They don't know their own names. They pass the time forgetting their name. Molly is nothing in comparison to Lancelot. He's really incredible. In one of Chrétien de Troyes's finest romances, there's a knight who sees a cart... The story is called "Knight of the Cart." He looks at it and gets onto it. He doesn't have any reason for doing so.

It's like, many centuries later, Dostoyevsky with his great characters who go out onto the street with a precise objective. They say: "I have to go and see Ivanovich, there's no time to waste." Then, when they go out, they suddenly wonder: "What was it I had to do again?" And they set off in the opposite direction. Here again we have faces turning away from one another. A curious game of faciality and landscapity. They no longer know. Or else... Kafka. K wants to go to the Palace of Justice and gives the address of the bank, or maybe it's the other way round, I don't remember... He goes in the other direction. Bizarre things happen.

But in the case of the Knights who forget even their name and are completely catatonic... Seeing as you are correct in not believing me... [*Tape interrupted*] [10:50]

Here is a lovely phrase: "The Knight of the Cart is occupied with deep reflections, like one who has no strength or defence against love which holds him in its sway." You see, it happens very quickly. This is connected to the face of the beloved. "He totally forgets himself, and he knows not whether he is alive or dead, forgetting even his own name, not knowing whether he is armed or not, or whither he is going or whence he came. Only one creature he has in mind and for her..." -- which is to say his beloved's face -- "his thought is so occupied that he neither sees or hears aught else. His horse takes him on tortuous paths" and so on. The Knight on guard arrives and he says: "Don't move!" etc. Three times. And the knight of the cart, who is called Lancelot – it's the romance of Lancelot – gets whacked on the head. He's furious, they fight... no it's not that passage. [Laughter; Deleuze looks through his text] I had noted it down, thinking I would need some evidence... P.153... No, I haven't underlined it... It's p.112-113. Maybe... 112-113. No, it's not that either. Okay, so as I just demonstrated, you won't have any proof. You're not going to get it.

Here then is the passage that I would like to read in its entirety because it's so beautiful and moreover short. And it seems that I've lost that too. In the paperback Folio edition... Chrétien de Troye. *Perceval, the Story of the Grail.* Page 111.

Perceval "saw, before he reached the tents, a flock of wild Geese, dazzled by the heavy Snow" -- no need to comment here -- "dazzled by the heavy Snow" -- I'll just say straight off that the snow is a white wall. -- "Did he see them? Yes, because they were fleeing as fast as birds can fly from a diving Falcon dropping out of the sky." -- The black hole of the falcon, the white wall of the snow. - "It struck at a single Goose, lagging behind the others, and hit it so hard that it fell to the earth. Perceval arrives too late without being able to [unclear word]. Without waiting he uses both spurs to where the Goose had fallen."

You see his line of flight? He set off in search of the grail, he sees some wild geese, and one being struck and falling, and immediately he goes to see what has happened. An epic or dramatic hero would never do such a thing. But this is the specificity of the novel, beginning with the "poor guy". It's the ballad of the poor guy who doesn't know his name, who doesn't know... When Achilles retires to his tent, it's a whole different story. It's an epic. It's not the same kind of faciality. The faciality of the novel, tragic or dramatic faciality, and epic faciality are very different things.

So, he goes to take a look. "The bird's neck had been wounded, and three drops of blood had come rolling out on the snow, dying it vivid red. The bird had not been badly hurt, just knocked to the earth, and before the knight could reach it, it had flown away in the sky, and Perceval sees at his feet the snow where it has been resting and the still evident blood. And Perceval, leaning on his lance, contemplated the sight of the blood and snow so mixed together."

He leans on his lance and looks. I'm saying this is landscapity. That "fresh color" - he looks at the three drops of blood on the snow, instead of carrying on with his knightly tasks. But this is precisely his task. The line of deterritorialization.

That "fresh color", the three drops of blood on the snow were "just like his beloved's face", and his beloved - if I'm not mistaken - is called Blanchefleur, and she continues to abandon him because he always has something else to accomplish although he doesn't know what it is. And you know that, historically, courtly love was established as a line of flight with respect to conjugality. It was the great movement... the great social line of flight in an active reaction to conjugality. Or should we say the reverse?

"Blood and snow so mixed together created a fresh color, just like his beloved's face, and as he stared he forgot what he was doing and where he was. The red stain against the white snow seemed just like her complexion. Before the king awakens..." – the king too is always asleep in the novel... King Arthur is fantastic, in this sense... Again, he's nothing like the kings of epics or the king of Shakespearean drama for example. He sleeps so deeply that a valet can pass by and knock his crown off with his elbow and he says: "You didn't do it on purpose? Very well." [Laughter]

So, "hey you over there"... ["Before the king awakens"], another guy appears, actually, several guys, "We've seen an knight out there, sleeping on his horse." – "Is he bearing arms?" -- "Oh yes, indeed!" -- "I'll go and talk to him... I'll bring him to court!", to the court of King Arthur. He has to bring back Lancelot... No, Perceval, but it won't be an easy task, as Perceval doesn't hear anything. He fights once again. Then they bring him before the king. And he explains, "oh, I just didn't hear anything", or something of the sort... [Tape interrupted] [19:16]

... In courtly love, there is a whole overcoding that happens through the face in reaction to conjugal relationships. So, we have this theme. And there's also the theme of the two faces. Perceval thinks of the face of Blanchefleur. Perceval-Blanchefleur. Perceval-Blanchefleur. So, we have this kind of passional faciality. There's the white wall – the snow with the three drops of blood on it – the black hole, which is both the falcon that attacks the geese and the catatonia, the black hole of passional catatonia into which Perceval falls.

And, lastly, there is a system of decomposition where traits of landscapity, traits of faciality, the exit from the black hole – all this becomes mixed to form a very curious thing. And we shouldn't be surprised, because if we take this complex -- in the most ordinary sense of "complex", that is, the combination of a group of things -- if we take our complex: white wall, face, white line, black hole, face inscribed on the white wall flowing towards the black hole, if we take all this together, we can say that each of the various elements pertains to very different semiotics, very different systems of signs.

Yet on the other hand, the whole forms a mixed semiotics. It's no surprise that the signifying face of the despot on the white wall already contains, already comprises, several black holes. Nor is it surprising that the passional system of black holes still contains a residue of white wall, if only in the form of the diachronic line. This melange shouldn't surprise us. It can only be seen at the third level... of a more elaborate study. Not by chance in courtly love is the lady often referred to as the

"white lady." The white lady. Blanchefleur. The knight's catatonia functions as a black hole, the lady as a white wall, with the vermillion of her cheeks daubed on the wall. Or, perhaps, her eyes are already black holes. Everything is mixed in a semiotics that involves all the components. And our task is to unravel it. So that's the second remark I wanted to make... [*Tape interrupted*] [22:37]

And now, to finish, before you start to speak, I want to show you a proof without saying where it comes from. Here is a face. There's no question this is a demon, a demon from afar, from Ethiopia. The eyes are black holes. The black hole is surrounded by a coiled serpent. Each time you have a coiled serpent, you can – though it's not obligatory, there are no rules in magic – you can place an eye in it. So, what's the result? -- The figure is a bit small, but I'll try to show it to you. [Pause] I'm annoyed that I've lost the most beautiful of the Ethiopian demons I had. [Pause; he keeps looking, then finds it] The most beautiful one is this one ... [Pause] It's a masterpiece. [Pause] Can everyone see it? [Pause] It's really so beautiful. [Pause] You can get a better look later... I'll pass it around.

It's on papyrus, so it's yellowish. White wall, black hole. But what is it? You remember the stories of Ethiopia? And here we return to the question of power. It's true what they say. The Negus, before being deposed, had an extraordinary court of magicians and his black hole-like gaze was well-known. And the Negus had descended from a whole series, a whole lineage, beginning from Solomon in which the eyes were defined as black holes. The magic power of the black hole. And the Negus, when making his rounds of the peasant villages, relied on this magic, which is typically Ethiopian - which is why I wanted to show you this example.

There's just one other case I can think of like this, but which is very different: certain documents published in the *Cahiers de l'Art Brut*. For example, for those of you've heard of an artist like [Adolf] Wölfli, who was for a long time interned in Switzerland, I believe... he made only faces composed of a circle and eyes like black holes. Or else another famous exponent of Art Brut, Aloïse [Aloïse Corbaz], who also makes black hole-eyes... Today I had too much to carry but next time I'll bring you some of her drawings. She was also interned for a long time. In different ways the drawings of both Wölfli and Aloïse are pure black holes placed against a white background that is full of miniatures, etc.

So here is my second observation, which is a bit confused. And I repeat: "Don't pass this image around!" Why did I want to say that? [Deleuze refers here to a student's comment in the first part of this session, under ATP I.3] Because there's an error, a risk of error in what I said. One might think that the first figure of face, which I called signifying despotic face, a single face viewed frontally, is like a unity that gathers together the different traits of faciality, while in the other figure there are at least two faces that are seen in profile, or that turn away from one another, and flow towards the black hole. At a certain level, one can say this.

But at a more rigorous and profound level, we have to admit that every face, whatever its figure, is by nature a multiplicity. It's just that I believe the first type of face – the signifying despotic face - is a multiplicity of frequency. That's why in the Ethiopian etchings, the Ethiopian scrolls, each time you make a circle you have the possibility of inserting an eye. The face of the despot is a multiplicity of frequency. While the face of the beloved, the passional face, is a multiplicity of resonance. That is, our two general types of faciality correspond to our two forms of redundancy, and the reason for this is simple: faciality is on one hand the substance of the signifier while, on the other, it is the attribute of subjectivity. So, it's normal that our redundancies – the way we have distinguished them – are found precisely at the level of the face, as both substance and attribute of redundancy. Okay, so here we have a second grouping of things to investigate... [*Pause, then tape interrupted*] [28:37]

Deleuze: ... There's a wonderful example -- I add this because I would like speak at least once

about this author -- in Henry Miller, who has always confronted the question in these terms: Can I break through the wall? Which wall are we talking about here? Even at the level of universal history, Miller hallucinates. He's one of the great delirious writers. There are two peoples who've confronted the wall. We don't know what this wall is. He doesn't need to tell us. American writers do better than philosophy here. He says there are two peoples: the Jews and the Chinese. What a surprise! The Jews failed at the last moment. They rebounded onto a phenomenon that was invented by Christ: subjectivity. And there are some fantastic pages on this. They bounced off the wall and fell into a black hole. The black hole of Christ and the passion of Christ. The Chinese, thanks to Buddhism - Miller says - passed through the wall, by way of a series of metamorphoses, animal becomings, musical becomings, all kinds of weird things, because you can't break through the wall without becomings. [*Tape interrupted*] [30:08]

... He throws himself into a kind of becoming masochist. And this is what happens. He bounces off the wall and falls into a black hole, which is the lesbian couple whose slave he becomes, and from then on he speaks only in barks: *woof woof, bow wow...* It's the end of *Sexus* and the beginning of *Nexus* that are expressed through Miller's barking. When he doesn't manage to break through the wall, rather than becoming-animal, he becomes a little dog. So, what's going on here? It's all very ambiguous. Because *bow wow wow...* becoming a little dog is also a becoming-animal of sorts... We no longer understand anything... But it's better this way, everything is mixed up. [*Pause*] Yes... [*Tape interrupted*] [31:05]

Georges Comtesse: Concerning marital conjugality in the 12th century, which was extremely strong, with its virility and all the phallocratic power of past epochs towards, let's say the "forced" bride... There was all this. And the lady constituted herself as a lady with this demand for love, making conjugality collapse by demanding a courtly lover. But also, the reverse happens because at the same time as she makes conjugality collapse, while not recomposing it, she nonetheless confirms another conjugality from which, it seems to me, we haven't yet managed to free ourselves and which might have a role in what you were saying when you spoke about falling asleep... which is perhaps a kind of awakening after all.

What I want to say by this is that, in order to constitute herself as the lady that demands love and imposes upon the Knight, the lover, a virginal surface of voluptuousness, that of whiteness for example – Blanchefleur, who might fascinate an obsessive like Bresson - whatever you like... The lady, the so-called subjugated woman, is above all fascinated by her rebellion which at the time could only be on the sly... she's completely fascinated - and anyone who has studied courtly love understands this – by a certain type of conjugality which perhaps still exists, the conjugality of male brotherhood. Male brotherhood, the couple formed by two men linked by a male friendship or love: this is what fascinates the courtly lady and provokes her becoming-lady or her attempts to recompose, or remake conjugality, by removing one of the partners of that couple to her own benefit... [*Tape interrupted*] [33:26]

Deleuze: ... Regarding the specific question of blood brotherhood and courtly love, that was the only moment when your own intervention became a bit sly, because you were invoking scholarly authority, and doing that is always a bit maladroit... because at that moment everyone senses that what you're saying isn't completely true. You said that all the specialists of courtly love know it, and this isn't the case. They have animated discussions on the rapport between different customs of blood brotherhood. But we can't take for granted what you were saying in that regard, even if the rest was very stimulating and fruitful, and we should add it to our reflections.

But I interrupted Félix for a moment [This reference is probably to early in the session, in the previous segment of ATP I.3, unless some omission occurred in editing the current session] and, before he begins to speak again, I just wanted to quickly read -- and I'll read this again later so you

can think about it for next week – a short passage by Henry Miller, which is very apt since it contains certain words... I admit I've sometimes cheated a bit with citations but this time all the words are there, I don't need to add any. I also checked the English version, which is almost identical. [Deleuze reads here from Miller's Tropic of Capricorn (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 239] He's speaking about his relationship with a woman he loved, and he says:

"She was never a being, such as might finally be caught in repose, but the mechanism itself" – that is, she was the mechanism itself -- "relentlessly operating the myriad mirrors which would reflect the myth she had created. She had no poise whatsoever; she was eternally poised above her multiple identities in the vacuum of the self... In the dark, locked away in the black hole with no world looking on..." Here he's trying to describe the black hole of love-passion, and he asks himself how he's going to get out, without becoming the dog who goes *bow wow*.

"In the dark, locked away in the black hole with no world looking on, no adversary, no rivals, the blinding dynamism of the will slowed down a bit, gave her a molten copperish glow..." -- the floating of the face -- "gave her a molten copperish glow, the words coming out of her mouth like lava, her flesh clutching ravenously for a hold, a perch on something solid and substantial, something in which to reintegrate and repose for a few moments. It was like a frantic long-distance message, an S.O.S. from a sinking ship."

And here we get to the essential: "At first I mistook it for passion, for the ecstasy produced by flesh rubbing against flesh..." -- Hence, love-passion, thrown into the element of passion -- "At first, I mistook it for passion, for the ecstasy produced by flesh rubbing against flesh. I thought I had found a living volcano, a female Vesuvius..." -- and I don't think there's anything phallocratic in the following phrase -- "I never thought of a human ship going down in an ocean of despair, in a Sargasso of impotence. Now..." -- he says of this woman that he loved -- "Now I think of that black star" -- black star, black hole -- "gleaming through the hole in the ceiling, that fixed star which hung above our conjugal cell, more fixed, more remote than the Absolute, and I know it was her, emptied of all that was properly herself: a dead black sun without aspect."

That's beautiful. It really is the path of love-passion into the black hole that it traces, passing by way of faciality. I wish I had written that. It's beautiful. So anyway, I interrupted Félix...

Guattari: I would like to sketch out... to take up again one aspect of the problem, because I think that if it might seem like nit-picking at the moment, maybe later this will become more significant, this oscillation that you were speaking of, between the two and the three which, by the way, forms part of the dimensions of structuralist ways of thinking. The question is... wait, let me finish, otherwise we'll never get anywhere.

Comtesse: I meant in the sense of an entanglement, not a progression...

Guattari: Listen to me... [*Tape interrupted*] [39:12]

Guattari: The deterritorializing movement provoked by the semiotic collapse that brings one to latch onto not merely the face, but even just a hole in the face, can happen because the coordinates, the "natural", ancestral territorial references have collapsed. So, the decoded lines of society, desire's lines of flight, throw themselves at the available hooks and holds. They race towards the abyss, towards nothing. We have to reconstitute artificial points of reterritorialization, which will be faces, couple relations, identities, roles, functions, nationalities, you name it.

This fabrication of subjectivation isn't merely a disaster, a race towards the void that we could define in Goethe's words as a function of the *demonic* in which different numbers follow a

regressive path. It's not merely a Romantic-style catastrophe. It is, at the same time, a positive function of the construction of a certain type of society - whether capitalist, socialist, bureaucratic, whatever... It's the condition for setting in motion an operation of juncture, work, fusion between semiotic systems, systems of production and social systems, which may also have a diagrammatic function different from the post-signifying regime Gilles was speaking about.

To be able to pass to these sign machines, which will function in science, production, social organization, through the worst despotism ever seen within territorialized systems, there must first be an operation of *tabula rasa*, blank page, a sweeping of the beach, the crushing of all previous semiotic features, all the old territorialized semiotic components. And once we've attained this kind of collapse, like the crumbling of... I don't know, like a kind of semiotic atom bomb or else cosmic black holes that lose all their normal coordinates... what is it that happens?

In the background of this beach-sweeping operation, there will be a system of overcoding, a system of seizing power over all the old semiotic components and materials of expression. That is to say, all the old forms of organization will be swallowed up by a particular new system of semiotic power grab, which will be the instrument of all other power grabs corresponding to capitalist formations – and these will no longer function through a more or less rhizomatic co-existence of systems of semiotization (through body, space, tattoos, word, ritual, dance and so on) but through the overcoding of *quanta of information*.

These *quanta* organize, subsuming within a single formula or machine, the different quantities of formalisms that are prefabricated everywhere else - unlike all other types of organization that bring into play systems of signs which maintain openings: that is to say, *quanta of possibility*. In the quanta of information, the only possibilities available are always pre-formatted. In diagrammatic systems – that is, when we break with this flattening of all the different semiotics on a single plane: the signifier - there are *quanta of possibility* that consist in passing from one stratum of coding to another. For example, we can pass from the world of the orchid to that of the wasp, from the world of energetic strata to that of semiotic strata, from one functioning of desire to another, without all of this being pre-programmed and ordered by the system... [*Tape interrupted*] [43:42]

Deleuze: Kleist never ceases making programs, his programs are very peculiar. He calls them programs but we're not sure that's what they are... [*Tape interrupted*] [43:58]

Deleuze: As workers say and feel, they are sick and tired of clocking in at 8 o'clock, 8:30 in the morning and so on... [Deleuze turns toward a student] And what were you saying about this preprogrammed life? Are you saying programs don't exist, that they don't work?

A student: They work, the workers have mistresses, or even others...

Deleuze: But having mistresses can be programmed, conjugality with a mistress can be programmed...

The student: Then they'll do something else, that's it! That's it! There's a possible opening...

Deleuze: But of course! What do you think we're saying? Of course, there is a possible opening...

Guattari: The workers might have mistresses, but...

The student: But even if there is an opening, they immediately fall into [unclear word], they fall into [unclear word], they fall again into dialectics.

Deleuze: They do what?

The student: They fall into dialectics.

Deleuze: Why?... [End of the recording] [44:53]