

## **Notes on Materialism**

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1. Materialism is the allegiance to the injunction to account for the order and novelty of 'bodies politic' in immanent terms, that is, without reference to transcendent organized and organizing agents. 'Bodies politic' are found in many registers, as Deleuze writes in his book on Nietzsche: 'Every relationship of forces constitutes a body--whether it is chemical, biological, social, or political' (45/40).

2. Materialism is critical when it does not rest content with an analysis of the properties of actual bodies politic but attends to their production in such a way that the conditions of their genesis (the transcendental or virtual) do not resemble the products (the empirical or actual).

3. Matter is thus the input to a production process. The key is to specify what is responsible for the order and novelty of the product: the input to the process, or the agent effecting that process.

4. Spiritualist dualisms have been theological and hence uncritical when they project an organized transcendent agent as responsible for the organized and novel nature of actual produced bodies. They have taken such recourse due to an impoverished concept of matter: that it is chaotic (and hence cannot account for the order of bodies) or passive (a matter tamed by the laws of God or deterministic science and hence unable to account for the novelty seen in the genesis of new bodies: the famous controversy over the alleged conflict of evolution and the second law of thermodynamics is a result of this thought pattern).

5. To supplement this perceived lack, while avoiding a relegation of the perception of order and novelty to the realm of illusion, spiritualisms abrogate credit for the order and novelty of the product to the agent. Spiritualisms are thus hylomorphic, crediting the transcendent agent with the imposition of a form on a chaotic or passive matter. The alleged chaos and passivity of matter are thus linked, as chaotic matter is tamed into passivity by the imposition of form.

6. Materialism avoids this exclusive disjunction by recourse to the self-ordering potentials of matter itself, as outlined in the researches of so-called complexity theory. In this way it relies upon the heuristic materialism of contemporary science, which amounts to nothing more than the epistemological injunction outlined in point One above. It can thus avoid the forced choice of determinism or dualism, accounting for order and novelty without the heavy ontological price of a dualism or the unacceptable phenomenal price of the denial of order and novelty.

7. Complexity theory has shown that at certain thresholds in their crucial parameters, systems are capable of spontaneous self-organization. That is, an organized and novel product results without any transcendent agent.

8. Human social production is thus theorized to be the joint responsibility of agent and matter. The worker who manipulates the parameters of a system so that one of its self-organizing thresholds is reached must be seen as having coaxed forth the self-organizing potential of the matter rather than as having imposed a form on a chaotic matter. Hylomorphism is thus revealed as rooted in the social privilege of the master who commands that a production be accomplished and who is only interested in the incarnation of his vision in the product.

9. The relation of self-ordering potentials to each other forms the virtual realm of actual bodies. Materialism thus contains both a thought of the 'ontological difference' (between the virtual and the actual, or in the terms of *A Thousand Plateaus*, abstract machines and concrete assemblages) and a thought of 'difference in itself' (the self-genesis of the virtual realm). These points decisively differentiate materialism both from a 'metaphysics of presence' of matter (the virtual realm of material systems is not present as an actual body, that is, it is not accessible by perception [there is a materialist theory of 'perception' {departing from two poles: the work of Francisco Varela in 'enactive cognition' and from Brian Massumi's 'The Autonomy of Affect'} that would equally depart from presence, but that's another story, so let's here consign 'perception' to its metaphysical heritage], but maintains itself in a differential relation to the other elements of the virtual field: in other words, a boiling point is not a molecule of water) and from a 'Platonism of the virtual' (the virtual realm of actual bodies politic is continually self-differing and creating itself anew).

10. For example, the 'fitness landscape' of biological species (the virtual realm of those populations) is continually changing (that is, producing new patterns of 'fitness' ['attractors' or what Deleuze calls 'abstract machines' or even 'black holes'] and new triggers of novel speciation ['bifurcators' or what Deleuze calls 'events', 'singularities', or 'lines of flight') as the actual members of those species interact (the relations of what Deleuze calls 'traits').

11. The key insight responsible for the transition from archaeology to genealogy in Foucault's thought is thus the necessity of taking seriously the multiplicity of factors at work in the actual social field. The archaeological investigation of the rules of a discursive field locked Foucault into a one-dimensional actual and hence a static virtual, so that historical change could only be seen as a mystic event or rupture. In genealogically conceiving the social as the field of a multiplicity of power-knowledge factors, the virtual of that social field is seen as populated with 'diagrams' of power (sovereignty, Panopticism, blood relations, sexuality) that ensure the ordering of human multiplicities and whose historical mutations can be traced rather than simply posited.

12. Materialism also has recourse to an ontological sense of matter, as opposed to the epistemological sense previously outlined. Deleuze and Guattari have both an ultimate ontological sense of matter as 'Body without Organs' (BwO) or 'plane of consistency' (the quantum level): 'the unformed, unorganized, nonstratified or destratified body and all its flows: subatomic and submolecular particles, pure intensities, preital and prephysical free singularities' (ATP 58/43); 'nonstratified, unformed, intense matter, the matrix of intensity, intensity = 0; ... Matter equals energy' (189/153), and a relative analytic sense as the input to a production process analyzed without reference to a transcendent ordering agent (ontologically speaking, then, relatively stratified facing the BwO and relatively destratified facing the product).

13. As a full explication of this ontological sense of matter would entail a confrontation with the various schools of quantum mechanics (Heisenberg, Bohr, and Bohm), and since this is beyond me, I'll just wrap this up here.