

Notes on a Deleuzean Theory of Melancholia: Object, Cinema, World

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The absence of any reflection on the category of melancholia in the work of Gilles Deleuze is not, *prima facie*, particularly surprising. The famous assertion early in *Anti-Oedipus*, according to which “A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic on the analyst’s couch,”¹ is hardly an isolated sentiment. Throughout that text, Deleuze and Guattari frequently come back to the figure of neurotic interiority in the same terms, writing of

the abject desire to be loved, the whimpering at not being loved enough, at not being “understood,” concurrent with the reduction of sexuality to the “dirty little secret,” this whole priest’s psychology—there is not a single one of these tactics that does not find in Oedipus its land of milk and honey, its good provider.²

This “sick desire,” the “desire to be loved, and worse, a sniveling desire to have been loved, a desire that is reborn of its own frustration,”³ is the affective apotheosis of the interiority that Deleuze’s work attacks without reserve from beginning to end. Elsewhere, Deleuze is just as harsh. In a short 1978 text on drug addiction, he writes of “The narcissism, the authoritarianism, the blackmail, the venom – only neurotics equal drug addicts in their efforts to piss off the world, spread their disease, and impose their situation.”⁴ The very idea of the cure, conversely, goes in an entirely different direction than that indicated in the foundational texts of psychoanalysis: “you can’t fight oedipal secretions except by fighting yourself, by experimenting on yourself, by opening yourself up to love and desire (rather than the whining need to be loved that leads everyone to the psychoanalyst).”⁵

This aggressive rejection of any form of neurotic subjectivity is an extension of Deleuze’s arguments in the early *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, where the target is any and all forms of bad conscience – conceived in Freudian as well as Nietzschean terms.⁶ It also motivates some of the most severe judgments leveled at Freud in *Anti-Oedipus*, according to which Freudian psychoanalysis mistakes the socio-historical specificity of neurotic Oedipal subjectivity for the general form of all investments of desire.

Given this animus, the interminable maudlin and narcissistic in-

1 Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 2.

2 Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 261.

3 Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 344

4 Deleuze 2006, p. 154.

5 Deleuze 1995b, p. 10.

6 See Deleuze 1983, pp. 104-9.

troversion that characterizes the melancholic on Freud's justly famous account could not be further from Deleuze's central concerns with dynamism, the event, and the Outside, nor from the austere, systematic and affirmative atmosphere of his conceptual constructions. Nevertheless, the speculative thesis I will advance here is that the psychoanalytic conceptualization of melancholia, precisely to the degree that it is irreducible to this kind of neurotic interiority, allows us to conceive of Deleuze as extending psychoanalytic insights rather than repudiating them. For all the force and significance of the anti-oedipal critique, one cannot help mourning the loss of psychoanalysis in Deleuze's work after *Anti-Oedipus*. The loss can be redressed not through the promulgation of a deconstructive fantasy in which Deleuze remained secretly indebted to Freud and Lacan, but through the creation of a new link between his later work and the psychoanalytic heritage. In particular, we will see that Deleuze's account of the cinema provides us with one point at which such a re-affiliation could begin to take hold.

What follows sketches an approach to melancholia that departs from Deleuze's work on the object-cause of desire, and then engages this work on the cinema, guided by a psychoanalytic trajectory that runs from Freud to contemporary Lacanian theory. The essential claim is found in a phrase that Deleuze uses to characterize the work of Félix Guattari before the two had published *Anti-Oedipus*: what is at stake is "a rediscovery of psychosis beneath the cheap trappings of neurosis."⁷ It is once melancholia is firmly located on the terrain of psychosis that a fruitful Deleuzian approach reveals itself.

The virtual character of *objet a*

Deleuze's major works in the sixties and early seventies bear the unmistakable stamp of Lacan's influence, particularly with regard to his theory of the object and its relationship to psychic organisation. *Difference and Repetition*, *The Logic of Sense* and *Anti-Oedipus* all explicitly mention Lacan's *objet a*, and while it is always the case with Deleuze that his concepts are woven with threads drawn from many sources, in this case the Lacanian influence is quite pronounced. Here, I will focus on *Difference and Repetition*, before drawing a pair of points from the work written with the psychiatrist Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

Like Lacan, Deleuze will insist that neither the real objects in the world that satisfy biological drives, nor these drives themselves, are sufficient to explain the nature of desire. And also like Lacan, he will argue that what distinguishes the two can be conceived in terms of a particular kind of object: "desire finds the principle of its difference from need in

⁷ Deleuze 2004, p. 195; cf. Deleuze 2004, p. 200: "The real problems have to do with psychosis (not the neurosis of application)."

the virtual object."⁸The term 'virtual' is a complex one in Deleuze, but for our purposes we can note that when he introduces (it in the context of an account of psychogenesis) he invokes the seminar on the *Purloined Letter*: "Lacan's pages assimilating the virtual object to Edgar Allen Poe's purloined letter seem to us exemplary. Lacan shows that real objects are subjected to the law of being *or* not being somewhere, by virtue of the reality principle; whereas virtual objects, by contrast, have the property of being *and* not being where they are."⁹

The first trait of the virtual object, then, shared with the Lacanian position, is that it is constitutively lost, lacking from its place while nevertheless constituting an unoccupied place that attends all biopsychical processes. "Loss or forgetting here," Deleuze notes "are not determinations which must be overcome; rather, they refer to the objective nature of that which we recover, as lost."¹⁰ It is this that will lead Deleuze, to call the virtual object "a shred [*lambeau*] of the pure past."¹¹

How does the virtual object function in the constitution and regulation of psychic life? In general terms, the virtual is the *problematic* for Deleuze. This category is to be understood in the way that Kant uses it in the first *Critique* when describing the Ideas of the faculty of Reason: "Kant never ceased to remind us that Ideas are essentially 'problematic,'"¹² Deleuze notes, insofar as we keep in mind that

'Problematic' does not mean only a particularly important species of subjective acts, but a dimension of objectivity as such which is occupied by these acts [...] Kant likes to say that problematic Ideas are both objective and undetermined. The undetermined is not a simple imperfection in our knowledge or a lack in the object: it is a perfectly positive, objective structure which acts as a focus or horizon within perception.¹³

The advent and regulation of the psyche is nothing other than the ongoing attempt to 'solve' the problems posed by the virtual object-causes of desire, where these problems are nothing other than the insistence of the objects themselves. *Objets a* do not act – they give the subject's acts their *raison d'être* by virtue of their irreducible insistence.

Given all of this, we can see what Deleuze means when, drawing

⁸ Deleuze 1995a, p. 106.

⁹ Deleuze 1995a, p. 102.

¹⁰ Deleuze 1995a, p. 102.

¹¹ Deleuze 1995a, p. 101, translation modified.

¹² Deleuze 1995a, p. 168.

¹³ Deleuze 1995a, p. 169.

on both Kant and psychoanalysis, he declares that “The virtual object is a *partial* object.” (DR 100) The virtual object is not only partial in the Lacanian sense, unable to be assimilated to the order of the material-real and the concept of the whole or global object, it is a positively incomplete object that functions as the ultimate structure for material-real processes by giving these a locus around which to turn. Rather than speaking of the non-being of the virtual, then, Deleuze will rather invoke its (non)-being or ?-being.¹⁴

From this point of view, neurosis and psychosis very clearly appear as those modes of psychic organisation in which the problematic nature of the virtual object overwhelms the always temporary resolutions forged from the contingent matters at hand. “Neuropaths and psychopaths,” Deleuze writes, explore this problematic nature of the object-cause of desire, “at the cost of their suffering.”¹⁵ He continues, in the same remarkable passage, writing that:

Precisely their suffering, their pathos, is the only response to a question which is itself endlessly shifted, to a problem which in itself is endlessly disguised. It is not what they say or what they think but their lives that are exemplary, and are larger than they are. They bear witness to that transcendence, and to the most extraordinary play of the true and the false which occurs not at the level of answers and solution but at the level of the problem themselves.¹⁶

We can see then why Deleuze will come to suggest “a helix or a figure 8,”¹⁷ as the schema of subjectivity, which invokes the two independent circles of the actual material and the virtual problematic and their intersection. In turn, “[w]hat then would be the ego, where would it be, given its topological distinction from the Id, if not at the crossing of the 8, at the point of connection between these two intersecting asymmetrical circles, the circle of real objects and that of the virtual objects or centres?”¹⁸

The ego therefore, rather than being an artifact or kernel of discrete interiority, is instead an ongoing product; the ego names the contingent and variable integration by the subject of the two objectal regimes.

14 Deleuze 1995a, p. 205. It is perhaps, in the end, these brackets that mark the real difference between Deleuze and Lacan. Lacan’s non-being and Deleuze’s (non)-being - two different conceptions of the being of the object.

15 Deleuze 1995a, p. 107.

16 Deleuze 1995a, p. 107.

17 Deleuze 1995a, p. 100.

18 Deleuze 1995a, p. 100.

No one has ever walked endogenously. On the one hand, the child goes beyond the bound excitations towards the supposition or the intentionality of an object, such as the mother, as the goal of an effort, the end to be actively reached ‘in reality’ and in relation to which success and failure may be measured. But *on the other hand and at the same time*, the child constructs for itself another object, a quite different kind of object which is a *virtual* object or centre and which then governs or compensates for the progresses and failures of its real activity: it puts several fingers in its mouth, wraps the other arm around this virtual centre and appraises the whole situation from the point of view of this virtual mother.¹⁹

With these points in mind, I would like to add a couple of remarks about Deleuze’s first work with Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*. It is a common view that this work constitutes a rejection of psychoanalysis, and presents a non-psychoanalytic theory of desire — nothing could be further from the truth. On balance, what looks like an off the cuff remark by Deleuze in an interview just after the book’s publication is likely its best gloss:

Lacan himself says ‘I’m not getting much help.’ We thought we’d give him some schizophrenic help. And there’s no question that we’re all the more indebted to Lacan, once we’ve dropped notions like structure, the symbolic, or the signifier, which are thoroughly misguided, and which Lacan himself has always managed to turn on their heads to bring out their limitations.²⁰

This means, on the one hand, dispensing with the paradigmatic status of neurosis and starting with the various forms of psychosis instead; on the other, it means following through in a rigorous way the very claims about the nature of the object of desire hinted at in Freud and then developed in such a powerful way by Klein and then Lacan. This is not to say that there is nothing in *Anti-Oedipus* that breaks with psychoanalysis, but rather that the book’s argument must be seen as part of the trajectory that begins with Freud and runs through Lacan if it is to be understood at all.

One of the key elements that *Anti-Oedipus* adds to the picture found in *Difference and Repetition* is an emphasis on the direct investment of the social by desire: “every investment is social, and in any case bears upon a socio-historical field.”²¹ This is not to say rather simply that humans are social beings, but rather that the social precedes the individual at the level of desire, and, importantly, that the investment of desire is not

19 Deleuze 1995a, p. 99

20 Deleuze 1995b, p. 14.

21 Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 342.

mediated by the family unit. In an inversion of the Freudian picture, the Oedipus complex as a formation of desire is itself the product of the more fundamental social organisation of modern capitalism. This is why they will speak of “the primacy of the libidinal investments of the social field over the familiar investment.”²²

The important consequence of this claim here is that — like the anti-psychiatry movement insisted before them — we cannot simply or in the first instance attribute madness to particular individuals. Again, though, Deleuze and Guattari mean by this something much more radical than the idea that particular forms of society make us ill. It is true that capitalism produces schizophrenics, for Deleuze and Guattari, but this can only make sense if we understand that social formations are themselves essentially means for the production of particular forms of subjectivity.

Given this, the desultory treatment that neurosis receives at Deleuze and Guattari’s hands can be more easily justified. What is at stake in the investment of desire – and this is the second point – can never be reduced to the ploys of an interior depth. Once the decision to adopt the paradigm of neurosis, as Freud does, we are left without any ability to grasp anything other than it: as Deleuze and Guattari insist, we get either Oedipus as a crisis or Oedipus as a structure, and nothing besides. In place of this, *Anti-Oedipus* gives us a psychotic model of subjectivity.²³ Schizophrenia, in their view, must be understood as the basic mode of the investment of desire. This is not any form of aestheticisation and admiration of madness — another common misconception — but rather a claim about the structure of subjectivity. At root, subjectivity is not prior to investment, but rather an ongoing, discontinuous and fleeting product of the processes of investment themselves. That the desire of the neurotic is necessarily desire-as-lack, mediated as it is by the symbolic order — for Deleuze and Guattari, from within the capitalist social formation — in no way reveals the more general situation. In fact, the schizophrenic situation is the fundamental one, and in it, “Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject.”²⁴

If we bring these two points together, we can see why the single

22 Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 356.

23 Further discussion of this claim, in the context of the Deleuze-Lacan interface, can be found in Bartlett, Clemens and Roffe 2014, pp. 66-9.

24 Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 26. In Lacanian terms, “the schizophrenic is not identified with the hole in the universe, the real cause of the lack in the Other, but with the object of jouissance which is not separated from the body.” Gallano 2012, p. 6) The only problem with this formulation from Deleuze and Guattari’s point of view is that the identification is not imaginary but real – the body is, at least in one respect, nothing other than the ensemble of these objects in their activity (objects of desire as desiring-machines).

most basic diagnostic distinction that Deleuze and Guattari introduce is between the paranoid and schizophrenic poles of social-libidinal investment, and makes no reference to neurosis. This is

the distinction between two poles of social libidinal investment: the paranoiac, reactionary and fascisizing pole, and the schizoid revolutionary pole. Once again we see no objection to the use of terms inherited from psychiatry for characterizing social investments of the unconscious, insofar as these terms cease to have a familial connotation that would make them into simple projections, and from the moment delirium is recognized as having a primary social content that is immediately adequate.²⁵

I will return to these two poles at the close of the piece.

By passing from Freud to Lacan, and then showing the through-line from the thesis of the *objet petit a* in Lacan to the virtual object in Deleuze, the problematic of melancholia seems to have been marginalized. But it is at this point that we can fruitfully turn to the rather unlikely seeming terrain of the Deleuzian theory of the cinema. It is there that an account of melancholia, bearing all of the structural traits it possesses in Lacanian psychoanalysis, nonetheless inflected by Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence on the social investment of desire, can be found.

Cinema and modern melancholy

How might the cinema be of interest here? I began by saying that Deleuze’s books on the cinema constitute one of the sites at which the category of melancholia might be developed. This is so despite the fact that, bar its stray and occasional adjectival use, the term itself is absent from both *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, as it is from all of the works of Deleuze discussed here. Despite this, though, the entire structure outlined earlier is in play there: the break with the material real alongside the persistence of the lost problematic object; the suffering that results from its unmediated presence; and the creation, from within this psychotic set-up, of new forms of relation with the object. It is the cinema itself that is the engine of this construction, the construction of a new meaning existence and action within the modern scene. To be particularly provocative, we could say that the cinema is for Deleuze what Joyce is for Lacan — the most significant, inventive, and, so to speak, ‘free’ response to the psychotic situation.

Summarily speaking, Deleuze’s books on the cinema involve three concomitant components. The first is a taxonomy of kinds of cinematic

25 Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 366.

signs; the second, a master distinction between movement- and time-images as general categories of these signs; and finally, a theory of thought. Despite being the subtitles of the two books and a rubric deployed in both to distinguish very different ways of treating time in the cinema, the second of these is ultimately the least consequential. This is registered on the surface of the text by the way in which some of the same films, and many of the same directors, are used as examples for both movement- and time-image cinema — as if the distinction ran lengthwise through the whole history of the cinema, like an undulating crack, rather than being inaugurated by a rupture that would simply correspond with Italian neo-realism and the French new wave.

The relationship between the cinematic image and human thought is therefore our primary concern here, and Deleuze will describe their interplay according to four rubrics.²⁶

The first concerns the *production* of the cinematic image itself. It may seem a banal point to make, but it is essential in Deleuze's view that we recognize the non-human origin of the images of the cinema. The eye of the camera is not a human eye, and the images that it produces are marked by this absolute and irreducible artificiality.

The second cinema-thought rubric concerns the consequent *reception* of the image. In order to explicate the nature of human reception of cinematic images, he turns to Henri Bergson's account of the sensori-motor schema (SMS). The SMS is a network of habits and expectations that connects and organizes the relationship between perception and action, while at the same time making perception and action feasible for finite beings in an open context. On the side of sensory reception, the SMS functions as a filter, constructing an image (a perception-image) of the world that subtracts from it everything that does not complement the psychophysical habits of which I am composed. On the other hand, the images of possible courses of action (action-images) are necessarily projections that model future outcomes on present habitual dispositions. Thus how the world appears to me and what I conceive as possible to do within it are ineluctably subject to the SMS.

When making use of this Bergsonian idea, Deleuze very clearly gives it an extra-subjective scope: the SMS is not mine, but rather ours, an intersubjective structure — whatever its particularities for each individual — for the organisation of experience. The significance of this qualification is unmistakable in the *Cinema* books, as we can see in passages like the following from *The Time-Image*:

26 A different way through these four rubrics is presented in what is to my mind the central, tour de force chapter of *The Time-Image*, entitled "Thought and cinema," Deleuze 1989, pp. 156-88).

Neither everyday nor limit-situations are marked by anything rare or extraordinary. It is just a volcanic island of poor fishermen. It is just a factory, a school . . . We mix with all that, even death, even accidents, in our normal life or on holidays. We see, and we more or less experience, a powerful organization of poverty and oppression. And we are precisely not without sensori-motor schemata for recognizing such things, for putting up with and approving of them and for behaving ourselves subsequently, taking into account our situation, our capabilities and our tastes. We have schemata for turning away when it is too unpleasant, for prompting resignation when it is terrible and for assimilating when it is too beautiful. It should be pointed out here that even metaphors are sensory-motor evasions, and furnish us with something to say when we no longer know what to do: they are specific schemata of an affective nature. Now this is what a cliché is. A cliché is a sensori-motor image of the thing.²⁷

Note that the very fact of the SMS gives to the production of cinematic images (first rubric) a particular radicality: the human perspective unavoidably constrains every image that it produces in the course of experience, but the images of the cinema are not subject to its rule. And not just produced, for the SMS also functions to *organize* these images. The SMS, this is to say, is in the end a montage-form for subjective experience. It joins the images that it subtracts from sensation in a very particular way, such that what is perceived provides a situation in which meaningful action is possible. This, then, will be the definition of the classical cinema: the ensemble of films in which images are presented and joined together in a way consonant with the way that the SMS presents and organizes images of the world. This is true even in the cases that mark the limits of the classical in the cinema: for Hitchcock and Ozu with respect to the production of images resistant to the SMS, and for Eisenstein, whose dialectical conception of montage presses at the limits of the SMS's own mode of the organisation of perception-, affection- and action-images.

What happens in the modern cinema on Deleuze's view? What happens, that is, when the cinema produces images which, being non-human in origin, do not arise on the basis of the SMS, and which are no longer organized according to it? The answer brings us to the third rubric, that of the *disruption* of thought by the modern (direct-time) image. What is meant by time-image here concerns us less than the challenge to classical montage that the modern cinema presents. Or, to put the matter another way, the introduction of images that cannot be assimilated (at least, not readily) by the SMS gives rise to a new problem of connection: how to join together images that do not make a natural fit with the habitual organisation of the SMS. Thus Deleuze will write that "The modern

27 Deleuze 1989, p. 20.

image initiates the reign of 'incommensurables' or irrational cuts."²⁸ We see these images, but they place us in the situation of one of Rossellini's protagonists, able to see, but not to react, nor to think the meaning of what we see.

The fourth and final rubric comes under the head of *creation*: the creation of new capacities in thought. A banal observation in one sense, it takes on its full amplitude by noting that for Deleuze, alongside the passage of the cinema, an historical development of broader scope — one that comes to intersect with developments in the production of cinematic image and its capacity to engender new modes of thought — has taken place. It is true that the history of the modern cinema confronts us with a powerlessness proper to thought, and demands that it raise itself up through the constitution of new capacities. But at the same time, a much more general and profound displacement of the SMS was underway. This displacement is due to the events of the twentieth century as such: "Why is the Second World War taken as a break? The fact is that, in Europe, the post-war period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe. These were 'any spaces whatever,' deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction."²⁹

As Paola Marrati glosses it,

It is not by chance that the crisis of the action-form occurs in the aftermath of World War II [...] We no longer believe that our actions have a bearing on a global situation, that they can transform it or even simply reveal its meaning. And, accordingly, we no longer believe in the capacity of a community to have hopes and dreams powerful enough to bring about the confidence necessary to reform itself. Our ties to the world are broken.³⁰

Modern subjectivity is born from an encounter with images that we could not assimilate without trauma, and from which we could not project future courses of action. The images of the world that we now habitually give ourselves no longer open onto a range of effective action.

However, Deleuze will also stress, we need not invoke these terrible traumas themselves, because the same effects now arise thanks to the domestic means deployed to overcome these traumas in the social order. Recall Deleuze's decisive passage in an interview with Antonio Negri:

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28 Deleuze 1989, p. 277.

29 Deleuze 1989, p. xi.

30 Marrati 2008, p. 105.

I was very struck by all the passages in Primo Levi where he explains that Nazi camps have given us "a shame at being human." Not, he says, that we're all responsible for Nazism, as some would have us believe, but that we've all been tainted by it: even the survivors of the camps had to make compromises with it, if only to survive. There's the shame of there being men who became Nazis; the shame of being unable, not seeing how, to stop it; the shame of having compromised with it; there's the whole of what Primo Levi calls this "gray area." And we can feel shame at being human in utterly trivial situations, too: in the face of too great a vulgarization of thinking, in the face of entertainment, of a ministerial speech, of "jolly people" gossiping.³¹

In *The Time-Image*, Deleuze will put it this way: "The modern fact is that we no longer believe in this world. We do not even believe in the events which happen to us, love, death, as if they only half-concerned us. It is not we who make cinema; it is the world which looks to us like a bad film."³²

There are thus two sources from which disruptions to the SMS arise: the cinema itself, and in particular the modern cinema, and history. The effects of these challenges are however very different, for the disruptive force borne by the creations of the modern cinema does not lead to a repudiation but a problematisation of the SMS. In this regard, the images produced by the cinema (again) distinguish themselves from the images of the world that we produce ourselves. The latter leave us with no recourse, rendering us purely passive, while the former act to instigate change in the viewing subject. At issue is a shock to thought, not at the level of content but form: the images presented to us are inassimilable for us in the present, but they will become thinkable to the degree that they themselves engender the development of new capacities of thought in thought itself.

In effect, what this means is that the images of the modern cinema are problematic objects — to be more precise, they give us a *new image of the world*. The modern situation institutes a schism between situation and action, image of the world and subject, but in this gap cinema is able to produce images that are neither veridically true nor false but novel.

Again Deleuze will borrow from Bergson, here, his concept of fabulation. Bergson initially uses the term, in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, to indicate the kind of delusory effects of close-minded religious thinking. However, certainly as Deleuze deploys it, it names a more fundamental capacity. We tend to go beyond our perceptions of the

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31 Deleuze 1995b, p. 172.

32 Deleuze 1989, p. 171.

world when confronted by traumatic experiences by fabricating responses (new action-images) that are not implicit in our perception of the world. Thus fabrication in the cinema engenders new images of the world, and engenders new relations with the world on this basis. Moreover, in a late interview, Deleuze is once again clear about the intersubjective weight of his account, arguing that "We ought to take up Bergson's notion of fabrication and give it a political meaning."³³

Confronted with the new images of the world created by the cinema, and forced by these images to think them – there is no voluntarism here, and throughout Deleuze will use Spinoza's 'spiritual automaton' to characterize the viewer of film – we are literally educated, drawn into a new way of sensing and thinking that the images of the world produced by the SMS do not warrant.

It is with this outline in hand that the problematic of melancholia can finally be outlined on Deleuzian terms. We find, first of all, a collapse of the mediating apparatus which gives sense to subjective experience – the SMS that loses its grip in the face of modern trauma. However, the object that we have lost our grip on, the world itself, is not itself gone, but now looms up as that on which we no longer have any grip. The world, no longer the locus of human agency, becomes problem. Finally, the moment of stabilization or compensation: the cinema as the means of creating a new set of connections with the world that no longer go by way of the former intersubjective order of the SMS. Here is the well-known passage from *The Time Image* that condenses this general line of argument:

The link between humanity and the world is broken. Henceforth, this link must become an object of belief [...] Only belief in the world can reconnect us to what we see and hear. The cinema must film, not the world, but belief in this world, our only link. The nature of the cinematographic illusion has often been considered. Restoring our belief in the world - this is the power of modern cinema (when it stops being bad). Whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, *we need reasons to believe in this world.*³⁴

Marrati devotes some powerful pages to this thematic in Deleuze's *Cinema* books, and in the current context the following passage comes to bear in particular

We "moderns" are not, according to Deleuze, in an interminable state of mourning for God and for the divine; it is not that we are unable to accept the news of the death of God, nor are we unable to

33 Deleuze 1995b, p. 174.

34 Deleuze 1989, pp. 171-2, translation modified.

wait for the "God to come," as Heidegger might maintain. In other words, modernity is not *melancholic*; it is not attended by the shadow of a lost object, nor is it split between those enlightened ones who could at least name and think their condition as impossible and unending mourning and those blind ones plagued by maniacal triumphs. We are lacking something very different: the world. We have "lost" the world, but the modality of this loss is not that of death, disappearance, distancing, or any of the notions connected with the register of mourning. The world is indeed there, but what is now lacking is the hope required to create new possibilities of life in it. The true modern problem is thus the problem of a faith that can make the world livable and thinkable once again, not in itself, but for us.³⁵

The first thing to note is that Marrati transparently conflates mourning and melancholia. Unlike mourning, it is not the shadow of a lost object, but the lost object itself — the object lost in advance, the virtual, problematic object =x —that is central. On the other hand, it is certainly the case that the modern problem for Deleuze is that the world persists, but it does so not 'as itself' but as just such a virtual problem, one that calls for an ongoing series of contingent 'solutions'. In fact, what we must claim is that the modernity of which Deleuze writes in the *Cinema* volumes is indeed melancholic. In particular, this account involves two of the crucial features we earlier identified, the persistence of the object we just referred to, and a recognition that a response is to be found not by overturning the state of affairs with an eye to a return to 'normal' neurosis, but by creating a new intermedial regime.

This work of stabilization is nothing other than the temporary resolution of the problem posed by the virtual object, in the terminology of *Difference and Repetition*, but in the terminology of the *Cinema* books, it is the very effort of modern cinema itself. Indeed, since for Deleuze neurosis itself – and the whole of the ordinary unhappiness with which it is associated – is a particular form of stabilization, there is nothing but stabilization, compensation, the patchwork construction of temporary formations. The modern situation described in the cinema books is not a particular case of melancholia, but the most general form of the phenomenon: the real appearing no longer as a stable referent but as a problem, a new way of taking this problem. The existing habits of the SMS have failed, and now a new set of habits of seeing, feeling and thinking are required – 'compensation', perhaps, but necessarily creation.

Now in fact the *Cinema* books present two particular responses to the presence of the lost object of the world – to borrow from Judge Schreiber, we might say that all leprous corpses are not equal. There is, on the

35 Marrati 2008, pp. 88-9.

one hand, the 'classical' melancholic response, which at denounces the world and clings ever closer to the subject position that gave access to it at the same time. This response is what we find *par excellence* for Deleuze in post-war Hollywood cinema. At the close of *The Movement-Image*, Deleuze identifies the characteristics of this moment in the cinema, all of which turn around the weakening or breaking of the links between situation and agency, the equation of agency and an inconsequential wandering or *balade*, and the supposition of a paranoid vision of the world as an endless tissue of deception. Ron Bogue admirably summarises the point, "when the sensori-motor schema begins to disintegrate, and with it the interconnecting links that hold action and situation together, the only totality remaining that can provide the coherence and coordination of space and time is either a network of circulating clichés or a conspiratorial system of surveillance."³⁶ When Deleuze writes, "[e]ven the 'healthiest' illusions fail,"³⁷ the response of Hollywood cinema was to pathologise fabulation itself and dwell in the gap that yawns between a situation that only appears as false, and actions that are no longer possible to conceive, let alone prosecute. In this regard, classical melancholia in the Deleuzian scheme must be seen to decline towards paranoia.

On the other hand, there is the passage through the torment of the presence of the absent world constituted by an internal reconstruction that dispenses with recourse to a confected imaginary. The act of cinematic creation, which gives us new images of thought, new images of the world and new means of acting in these images, necessarily presents a schizophrenic character. It transforms by shattering, stupefying all pre-existent images; in this sense, it is the cutting edge that runs between classical and modern as such.

All of this returns us to the final key feature of melancholia as given in classical psychoanalysis: the matter of the identification of the ego and the lost object. If identification has not played a part in the discussion of Deleuze so far, this is because, in his view, it varies in significance depending on which tendency (paranoid or schizophrenic) is in play. For Deleuze and Guattari, to repeat, the hallmark of schizophrenia is the manifest absence of the subject: "Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject."³⁸ In paranoia, on the other hand, the subject becomes the polarized black hole around which everything turns.

The various modalities of melancholic construction, therefore, run between the paranoid pole marked by i'(a), the (new, auxiliary) imaginary formation around the *objet a*, and the schizophrenic pole at which

36 Bogue 2003, pp. 108.

37 Deleuze 1986, p. 211.

38 Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 26.

the *objet a* is present without imaginary mediation, in its essential problematicity.³⁹ The entire ground between the two is the realm of melancholic forms.

World

It is important to see here – and the passage through *Difference and Repetition* and *Anti-Oedipus* was meant to convey nothing else – that the loss of the world in modernity and the hope that cinema offers for reconnecting to it is *not analogous* to the process of psychosis, but this very process itself, grasped on what Deleuze takes to be its own proper regime, in fact and by right. If the investment of desire is always primarily social, and the subject of desire a secondary, contingent and variable product of this investment, then the stakes of psychosis in Deleuzian terms must themselves play out at the social level, and at the level of the creation of new social institutions of thought. Such, in any case, is one trajectory (though certainly not the only one) according to which a Deleuzian account of melancholia might begin to be constructed.

The Deleuzian account of melancholia I have just described is precisely what is at issue in the following text, which appears in Deleuze's late work *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Reflecting on the place of Leibniz's philosophy in the history of western thought, and in particular of the contemporary situation in which all fundamental theological principles have been undone, Deleuze asks:

what happened [...] before the world lost its principles? Closer to us, it was necessary for human reason to collapse, as the last refuge of principles, the Kantian refuge: it dies through "neurosis." But even earlier, a psychotic episode was necessary, the crisis and collapse of all theological Reason. This is where the Baroque assumes its position: Is there a way of saving the theological ideal, at a moment when it is enbattled on all sides, and when the world cannot stop accumulating "proofs" against it, violences and miseries, at a time when the earth will soon tremble...? The Baroque solution is the following: we will multiply principles—we can always pull out a new one from our sleeve—and consequently we will change its use. We will no longer ask what giveable object corresponds to this or that luminous principle, but rather what hidden principle corresponds to this given object, that is to say, this or that "perplexing case."⁴⁰

39 I make use of this matheme the way Fabien Grasser deploys it in "Stabilisations dans la psychose."

40 Deleuze 1988, pp. 90-1.

The Fold concludes with a famous invocation of a post-neurotic present, one that does away with both the unshakeable onto-theological certitude of Plato and Descartes and the restricted melancholia of the Leibnizian conceptual construction, always having in the final analysis to advert to divine supervenience. In its place, the local contingent construction of new connections that Deleuze calls 'nomadic' is our schizophrenic sense of a generalised melancholia. The world is neither the ordered realm of reason in classical thought, nor the neurotically structured world of Kant and his epigones. Instead, it is just *this* world, the perplexing object requiring, each time and in each encounter, a new construction.

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