An Ethics of Critique: from Nomadology to Anarcheology
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It has now been almost 50 years since Derrida gave his assessment of the state of philosophy in France in "The Ends of Man" [1]. He was looking back at the post-War generation who were already, within a mere 20 years, beginning to be displaced by the generation of Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, and others.

What marks out that emerging generation and its milieu is something that Derrida calls a "trembling" (EM, 133). This trembling, this *tremblement de terre*, this earthquake, was shaking the foundations of the secure co-belonging of 'man' and Being. It was threatening to sweep away not only the great systems of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger but also the last vestiges of humanism in Sartrean phenomenology and existentialism.

At the end of the essay, Derrida identifies three signs that mark the effects of this trembling. These are: **1)** the reduction of meaning (to "a 'formal' organization which in itself has no meaning"); **2)** the gamble that we can open up to an outside through new styles of writing and thinking; **3)** the "increasingly insistent and increasingly rigorous recourse to Nietzsche".

In this brief paper I want to take some of these lines and follow them – through Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Foucault.

Derrida ends his 1968 paper with the question, "But who, we?" (EM, 136). A few years later, Deleuze finished his talk at a Nietzsche Colloquium (Colloque de Cerisy, "Nietzsche aujourd'hui?", July 1972) with the question, "Who are our nomads today, our real Nietzscheans?" [2] (NT, 149).

I want to focus on Deleuze for a moment because he is working in the same philosophical – and critical – milieu that informs Derrida's talk. One of the striking features of Deleuze's talk is the way it echoes a key part of Derrida's. Derrida identifies two responses that we can make to the "radical trembling" (EM, 134). The first, remaining in a sense on the 'inside', is to engage in a practice that might punch through to the outside, by "using against the edifice the instruments or stones available in the house, that is, equally, in language" (EM, 135). But one has to acknowledge that this "continuous process of making explicit, moving toward an opening" always risks being trapped in a continuous confirmation, consolidation, and *relève* of that which one deconstructs. The second response would be to try to "change terrain", to place oneself outside by "affirming an absolute break and difference" (EM, 135). This attempt also comes with a risk: that one will simply remain on the inside, having been tricked by a *trompe-l'oeil* effect.

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[1] Derrida, "The Ends of Man", 1972. Henceforth EM.
[2] Deleuze, "Nomad Thought", *The New Nietzsche*, 1986. Henceforth NT.

Despite the risks, however, Derrida asserts that these are the options we must follow. Rather than choosing between them, however, we need to follow both at the same time: "one must speak several languages and produce several texts at once" (EM, 135).

In Deleuze's text on Nietzsche, a surprisingly similar pair of options is indicated; although according to Deleuze, Nietzsche only chooses the second option: "In his own writing and thought Nietzsche assists in the attempt at decodification–not in the relative sense, by deciphering former, present, or future codes, but in an absolute sense, by expressing something that cannot be codified, confounding all codes." (NT, 143).

If it is legitimate to superimpose these two analyses, we could say that Derrida suggests a two-pronged approach, while Deleuze's Nietzsche rejects the first 'internal' critique for a more radical project of absolute decodification. But, I would argue that Deleuze is too quick to dismiss Nietzsche's commitment to "deciphering former, present, or future codes". What after all is genealogy if not this project of deciphering?

If we accept this point, we can then say, in the spirit of Derrida's presentation, that a shared view of critique emerges out of this generation of French thinkers, in particular through its engagement with Nietzsche. And, again in the spirit of Derrida's presentation, I think we can say that these thinkers (Nietzsche + Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault) continue, 50 years later, to be the theoretical touchstones of a way of conceptualising and practicing critique.

One of the aspects of post-War thought that Derrida criticises is that even though the theme of history is present during this period, very little attention is paid to the "history of concepts", in particular "the concept of man" (EM, 119). What is particularly striking about the period that follows Derrida's talk, however, is the extent to which this gap is filled. And, what is even more striking, is that not only is the history of the *concept* of man critically investigated, but a whole new way of investigating the modes of being human and of active subject-formation emerges – especially from the work of Foucault in the early 1980's, leading to later work by theorists such as Judith Butler.

One strand in this development is Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche's work as embodying what he calls "nomad thought". This nascent post-humanist critique of man also emerges in Foucault's work, from which I will single out two concepts that may have been overlooked.

But first, nomad thought: according to Deleuze, Nietzsche's account of the founders of empires (in *Genealogy of Morality*, Essay 2) overlooks the importance of the fact that empires also create nomads at their peripheries. In opposition to the despot's bureaucratic machine, which absorbs rural communities, at the periphery groups of nomads depart to form their own "nomadic war machine": they "begin to decodify instead of allowing themselves to be overcodified" (NT, 148). These "extrinsic nomadic unit[s]" are opposed to the "intrinsic despotic unit[s]" of the empire's administrative apparatus (NT, 148). What does this have to do with critique? Well, for Deleuze, philosophy has always been on the side of the imperial state: it is part of "the history of sedentary peoples" and

has always been ultimately concerned with "law, institutions, contracts" (NT, 148). This is why Nietzsche is the originator of a particular type of counter-philosophy.

To be precise, the importance of Nietzsche is that he is the first philosopher who, in the face of the multiple phenomena of "decodification" in modernity, "in which our codes break down at every point", responds not with a new attempt at recodification, but by saying that the process still hasn't gone far enough (NT,143). In other words, Nietzsche's thought is itself "a machine of war—a battering ram…a nomadic force" (NT, 149). Today, in 1973, we "seek a kind of war machine that will not recreate a state apparatus, a nomadic unit related to the outside that will not revive an internal despotic unity" (NT, 149). Hence the importance of the question, "'Who are our nomads today, our real Nietzscheans?'" (NT, 149).

In Derrida's terms, this means that we seek a way out of the sterile discourse of man that humanism maintains; a "change of terrain" that is always risky and uncertain, that follows Nietzsche in its search for a change of "style", towards a plethora of "*plural*" styles (EM, 135).

The number of ways in which the work of Foucault contributes to these developments are so great that surveying them would be beyond my scope. However, I want to draw attention to two concepts that Foucault picks up and seems to drop, but that I find helpful in thinking about an ethics of critique today. First, in one of his essays on Nietzsche, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"[3], Foucault explains the importance of genealogy in this way: "The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self and the proliferation of a thousand lost events on the site of its empty synthesis," (NGH, 81 [DEIII: 141], trans modified). We can think of this as Foucault's version of the first half of the dual approach suggested by both Derrida and Deleuze. An 'internal' critique that takes the form, not of a deconstructive reading (Derrida) or a merely relative "deciphering" of former, present, or future codes (Deleuze), but an explosive splintering of the self and exposure of the emptiness at the heart of its synthesis.

Another way to conceptualise this critical project, which Foucault playfully picks up and drops in his lectures at the Collège de France in 1979-1980, is through the concept of "anarcheology".[4] In this preliminary lecture, Foucault is trying to distance his approach, which involves a methodological rejection of the necessity of power, from anarchism. He is not proposing anarchism, he says, but he does want every investigation of power to begin with a methodological assertion of "the non-necessity of all power of whatever kind" (OGL, 78). Referring, for example to his work on the history of the prison, he says, ""The anarcheological type of study…consisted in taking the practice of confinement in its historical singularity, that is to say in its contingency, in the sense of its fragility, its

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[3] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" [1971], in *The Foucault Reader*. Henceforth, NGH. Foucault's other essay on Nietzsche is "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx" [1967].

[4] Foucault, (2014). *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France 1979-1980*. Edited M. Snellart, Trans G. Burchell. Palgrave Macmillan. Henceforth, OGL.

essential non-necessity, which obviously does not mean (quite the opposite!) that there was no reason for it and is to be accepted as a brute fact" (OGL, 79).

Therefore, in place of a humanist-inspired ideology-critique, that would follow the path of "universal category—humanist position—ideological analysis and reform program", Foucault's anarcheology proposes "refusal of universals—anti-humanist position—technological analysis of mechanisms of power and, instead of reform program: further extend points of non-acceptance" (OGL, 80). So, once again, the critical project proceeds through a dissociative historical analysis that has the effect of extending "points of non-acceptance"; or, as Deleuze would say, furthering the process of decodification; or, as Derrida would say, affirming an absolute break and difference.

In looking for an ethics of critique today, I think that this project that began with Nietzsche, found multiple resonances in 1960's French philosophy, including in Derrida, and took one particular line of flight through Deleuze and Foucault, is still worth pursuing today: a nominalist rejection of universal, humanist categories; an historically oriented, 'internal' investigation of our contemporary modes of being human; and occasional experimental leaps into new forms of life.