

B-008 22594 107718

A Shock to Thought

expression after **deleuze** and **guattari**



edited by **brian massumi**

A SHOCK TO THOUGHT

Expression after Deleuze and Guattari

Edited by Brian Massumi



London and New York

First published 2002
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE
Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Reprinted 2003

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

© 2002 Brian Massumi for selection and editorial matter;
individual chapters, respective authors

Typeset in Bembo by Taylor & Francis Books Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or
utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known
or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any
information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the
publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A shock to thought: expression after Deleuze and Guattari /
[edited by] Brian Massumi.

p.cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Literature—Aesthetics. 2. Aesthetics. 3. Deleuze, Gilles—Criticism and
interpretation. 4. Guattari, Félix—Criticism and interpretation. I. Massumi, Brian.

PN45 .S416 2002

801'93—dc21

2001058882

ISBN 0-415-23803-X

ISBN 0-415-23804-8

A SHOCK TO THOUGHT

'For those interested in new developments in aesthetics, literature and cultural theory, this will prove an indispensable volume and an inspiring collection.'

Keith Ansell Pearson, *University of Warwick*

'This volume will have a prominent, indeed privileged, place at the interface between philosophical and aesthetic reflections within the burgeoning field of Deleuze–Guattari studies.'

Charles Stivale, *Wayne State University*

A Shock to Thought brings together a collection of outstanding essays that explore the implications of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of expression in a number of contemporary contexts: beauty vs. the sublime in post-modernism, sensation and politics, the conditions of cultural emergence, and the virtual in politics, poetry, dance, music and digital culture. The volume also makes available an interview with Guattari which clearly restates the 'aesthetic paradigm' that organizes both his and Deleuze's work.

A Shock to Thought will be of interest to all those in philosophy, cultural studies and aesthetics.

Brian Massumi is in the Department of Communication at the Université de Montréal. He is the translator of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and the author of *The User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* and *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*.

CONTRIBUTORS

Paul Bains is the translator of *Power and Invention* by Isabelle Stengers (1997) and of Félix Guattari's *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (with Julian Pefanis) (1995). His recently completed doctorate from Murdoch University, Australia was on *The Primacy of Relations*. He continues to research the topic of minds and their brains with the invaluable guidance of the Center for Neurobiological Investigations, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Argentine Republic.

Alan Bourassa is an assistant English professor at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick. He is currently working on a book entitled *Writing the Non-Human: Faulkner, Wharton and the Anglo-American Novel*.

Catherine Dale is a doctoral student in the English Department at the University of Melbourne.

Aden Evens is a postdoctoral fellow at the Pembroke Center at Brown University. His book-in-progress reflects his interests in philosophy, cultural theory, music, mathematics, and the sciences. Like many interdisciplinary scholars, he moves around a lot, but his family and piano are in Boston.

Gary Genosko is Canada Research Chair in Sociology at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. He is the author of *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* (forthcoming), and the editor of *The Guattari Reader* (1996) and *Deleuze and Guattari: Critical Assessments* (Routledge, 2001).

José Gil is professor of philosophy at the University of Lisbon and at the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris. He is the author of *Metamorphoses of the Body* (1998) and *Fernando Pessoa ou la métaphysique des sensations* (1988).

Mani Haghighi lives in Tehran and Toronto. He is the Persian translator of Michel Foucault's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, and has edited an anthology of postmodern texts, *The Aporia of Signs* (1995).

Michael Hardt is associate professor of literature at Duke University. He is the author of *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (1993) and co-author with Antonio Negri of *Labor of Dionysus* (1994) and *Empire* (2000).

Thomas Lamarre is associate professor of East Asian Studies at McGill University. He is the author of *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription* (2001) and *Shadows on the Screen: Tanizaki Junichirō on Cinema and Oriental Aesthetics* (forthcoming). He is currently co-editing a volume on 'The Impacts of Modernities' for *Traces: A Multilingual Series of Cultural Theory*.

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger is an internationally renowned artist, feminist theorist, and psychoanalyst. She is Professor of Psychoanalysis and Aesthetics at Leeds University. Her recent solo exhibitions include The Drawing Center (New York), Museum of Modern Art (Oxford), The Israel Museum (Jerusalem) and the Palais des Beaux Arts (Brussels). She is the author of *Regard et Espace-de-bord matrixiels* (La Letter Volée), forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press under the title *Matrixial Gaze and Borderspace*.

Brian Massumi teaches in the communication department of the Université de Montréal. He is the author of *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (1992), and (with Kenneth Dean) *First and Last Emperors: The Absolute State and the Body of the Despot* (1993).

Melissa McMahon is completing a Ph.D. on Deleuze and Kant in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Sydney. She is translator of numerous published articles in the area of modern French philosophy and film theory, and most recently translated and introduced an article by Antona Soulez on Wittgenstein for a special issue of *Hypatia* on contemporary French women philosophers.

Andrew Murphie is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Communications at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. He has published on a range of issues: performance and the visual arts, popular music, contemporary cultural theory, virtual media and digital aesthetics. He is currently writing a book in the area of culture and technology with John Potts and is working on two other books on machines, ethics and aesthetics. He has in the past worked as a marketing manager and production manager for arts companies, and as a freelance theatre director.

Steven Shaviro teaches in the Cinema Studies Program at the University of Washington. He is the author of *Passion and Excess* (1990), *The Cinematic Body* (1993) and *Doom Patrols* (1997).

CONTRIBUTORS

Stephen Zagala (né O'Connell) is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the Australian National University. His thesis is concerned with the cultivation of dynamic visual forms in the Melanesian archipelago of Vanuatu. He continues to travel with Deleuze, but prefers to keep him concealed under a newly acquired pith helmet.

INTRODUCTION

Like a thought

Brian Massumi

because they've said too much to be born
and said too much in being born
not to be reborn
and take a body

(Artaud, 1999: 88)

The world does not exist outside of its expressions¹

A clearer statement of the importance of the concept of expression for the philosophy of Deleuze and Deleuze–Guattari would be hard to find. Their entire ontology, this formula proclaims, revolves around it. A less fashionable concept, for late twentieth-century European thought, would also be hard to find. For many years, across many schools, ‘expression’ has been anathema. The underlying assumption has been that any expressionism is an uncritical subjectivism. Expression conjures up the image of a self-governing, reflective individual whose inner life can be conveyed at will to a public composed of similarly sovereign individuals – rational atoms of human experience in voluntary congregation, usefully sharing thoughts and experiences. In a word: ‘communication’. Communicational models of expression share many assumptions. These include the interiority of individual life, its rationality, an effective separation into private and public spheres, the voluntary nature of the collective bonds regulating that separation, the possibility of transparent transmission between privacies or between the private and the public, and the notion that what is transmitted is fundamentally information. All of these assumptions have been severely tested by structuralist, poststructuralist, post-modern, and postpostmodern thought. Communication has long since fallen on hard times and with it, expression.

Communication, Deleuze and Guattari agree, is a questionable concept. Yet they hold to expression. ‘*What takes the place of communication is a kind of expressionism.*’²

Neither common form nor correspondence

So closely bound have the concepts of expression and communication become that Deleuze and Guattari's insistence on discarding one while retaining the other might well seem quixotic. There are certainly consequences to going that route, and Deleuze and Guattari are not shy about them. A willingness is required to forego certain bedrock notions, with potentially unsettling repercussions even for anti-communicationalists.

'One can never', Deleuze and Guattari begin, 'assign the form of expression the function of simply representing, describing, or averring a corresponding content: there is neither correspondence nor conformity' (1987: 86). So far so good. This is a restatement of the well-known critique of the referential function of language that is presupposed by the communicational model, and the renunciation of which unites its foes. Deleuze and Guattari join the critics, then step away. They go on to say that 'it would be an error to believe that content determines expression by causal action, even if expression is accorded the power not only to "reflect" content but to act upon it in an active way' (1987, 89).

The assertion that expression is actively formative of its content, or its 'objects', is a constructivist strategy underpinning most contemporary anti-communicational semiotics. It performs a causal twist enabling semiotically savvy ideology critique. 'Discourse', by this account, constructs the subject by constructing the objects in polarity with which the subject forms. The subject's expression is still causally linked to its content, but the nature of the link has changed. What traditionally appeared as a one-way determination of expression by a mirroring of or a moulding by its content (the correspondence or conformity of 'representing, describing, or averring') reappears as a formative polarity (a subject-object dialectic). It is less that the subject willfully speaks its contents than that it is spoken, unwitting, by its discursively orchestrated object-relations. If the spoken subject expresses anything, it is – indirectly – its own circuitious determination: the anything-but-transparent dialectic of its orchestrated formation. The ultimate content of all expression is this occulted determinative power incumbent in discourse – which the critic has the counter-power, if not political duty, to uncover.

When Deleuze and Guattari call into question this dialectical solution, they are abandoning ideology critique along with its communicational nemesis. Why throw out baby-ideology with the dirty communicative bathwater? If you choose to abstain from both communication and ideology, what's left? Not 'postmodernism'.³ From a Deleuze-Guattarian perspective these three approaches, for all their differences, have too much in common philosophically. What they share is an attachment to a concept of determination predicated, in one way or another, despite any protestations to the contrary, on conformity and correspondence.

Traditionally, for communicational purposes, expression is anchored to a 'content'. The content is viewed as having an objective existence prior and

exterior to the form of its expression. The assumed solidity of the content transfers, across the mirror-like correspondence or moulded conformity, into a trustworthiness of the subjective expression. Moulded, mirroring, expression faithfully conveys content: re-presents it at a subjective distance. This enables communication, understood as a faithful exchange of contents transmitted at a convenient distance from their objective emplacement. In this model, content is the beginning and end of communicative expression: at once its external cause and its guarantee of validity. This causal guarantee is crucial, because the subjective distancing upon which communication is predicated enables deception no less than exchange. If there were no common form or correspondence, who could say? And what? Anyone, anything – out of control. The ‘postmodern’ is an image of communication out of control. Seeming to have lost its mooring in objective conformity or correspondence, it appears uncaused, unmotivated, in endless, unguaranteed ‘slippage’.

One of the reasons Deleuze and Guattari find the basic communicational model questionable is that it assumes a world of already-defined things for the mirroring. Expression’s potential is straight-jacketed by this pre-definition. In *Logic of Sense* (1990a), Deleuze confronts the ‘propositional’ view of language underpinning this model, arguing that it allows three fundamental operations, none of which are up to the measure of expression’s potential: a three-sleeved straight-jacket. The first cuff, ‘designation’, concerns the faithfulness of the expression to the *particular* state of things with which it is in conformity or to which it corresponds: its objectivity. ‘Manifestation’ is the subjective correlate of designation. It pertains to the *personal* desires and beliefs owned up to by the designating ‘I’. ‘Signification’ is founded on the capacity of designation to apply beyond particulars to kinds, in other words to *general* ideas and their implications: ‘it is a question of the relation of the word to universal or general concepts, and of syntactic connections to the implications of the concept’.⁴ If designation concerns the true and the false, signification concerns the *conditions* of truth and falsehood: ‘the aggregate of conditions under which the proposition’ would be ‘true’. ‘The condition of truth’, it must be noted, ‘is not opposed to the false, but to the absurd’ (Deleuze, 1990: 14–15).

The wilful absurdism of postmodernisms of the Baudrillardian kind took off from signification. The ‘simulation’ they celebrated is an unmooring of the conditions of truth from the true and the false: from designation. Unhinged from designation, lacking a referent, the productive operation of the conditions of truth becomes indistinguishable from a proliferating absurdity: an absurdity by ‘unmotivated’ excess of signification. These particular counter-conditions of absurdity, however, were staged by postmodernists insufficiently unbuttoned from the true – and arguably nostalgic for it – as a parody or ironic subversion of the truth rather than something other than it, to which it is ‘opposed’. Both parody and irony covertly conserve the true. They need the idea of a conformity or correspondence between expression and content as a

foil. Ultimately, the postmodern absurdity is to retain the true *in order*, repeatedly, to lampoon it by bracketing its objective anchoring. Why not just be done with it?⁵ From a Deleuzian perspective, parody and irony protest too much. The way in which they performatively foreground the signifying virtuosity of the speaking or writing subject seem distinctly to manifest a personal desire for a certain kind (a cynical kind) of masterful presence. The 'nostalgia' their postmodern practitioners have sometimes been accused of may have betokened, even more than a residual attachment to the truth, an investment in manifestation: a nostalgia for the master-subject whose 'death' postmodernism manifestly announced.⁶ The same might be said of a precursor of this form of postmodernism, surrealism. More sober postmodernisms were to find somewhere seriously absurd to take the unanchoring of the true: into the sublime.⁷

The ideological approach is in many ways closer to Deleuze and Guattari's approach than either the communicational or postmodern, in spite of their frequent criticisms of it. It has major advantages over them. For one thing, it links the workings of language to a problematic of power, insisting on the intrinsic connection between language and extra-linguistic forces. It also breaks the symmetry between expression and things 'as they are' already. Models of mirroring or moulding – in a word, representational models – see the basic task of expression as faithfully reflecting a state of things. They focus on the 'as is', as it is taken up by language. Ideology critique focuses on the 'what might be'. Its preoccupation is change. To open the way for change, it must break the symmetry between the saying and the said. It does this by transforming the content-expression correspondence into an asymmetry, as subject-object polarity. The question is displaced onto what governs their dialectic: how the two come together, or what mediates their interaction. Mediation steals centre stage from conformity and correspondence.

The problem for Deleuze and Guattari is that conformity and correspondence sneak back in through the back door. The subject formed through the dialectic does not simply mirror its objects. It embodies the system of mediation. It is a physical instantiation of that system. That is the ideological proposition: that a subject is made to be in conformity with the system that produced it, such that the subject reproduces the system. What reproduces the system is not what the subject says *per se*. The direct content of its expressions do not faithfully reflect the system, since the relation of the system to its own expressed content has been 'mystified' by mediation. The fundamental mystification consists in making the subject's adhesion to the system appear as a choice. Mystified, the subject must be trained to truly express the system it has unwittingly been reproducing. This is the role of critique.

The subject does not express the system. It *is* an expression of the system. The system expresses itself in its subjects' every 'chosen' deed and mystified word – in its very form of life (its habitus, as Pierre Bourdieu (2000: 256–85) would say). Where, in the conformity and correspondence between the life-

form of the subject and the system of power that produced it, has the potential for change gone? Conscious critique seems an unloaded weapon in the face of the relentless acting out of powers of conformity on the preconscious level of habitus. The only conscious force strong enough to counter those powers is self-interest: a subject must come to an unmystified consciousness of its own interests as occupying the position it does. But doesn't that lock the subject all the more firmly into position? And aren't decisions truly motivated by self-interest a matter of choice? Doesn't making a true choice depend on seeing through mystification to an analysis of the real state of affairs (designation), then faithfully conveying the general applicability of the ideological propositions arrived at (signification) to others of your class, as one sovereign individual in voluntary congregation, usefully sharing thoughts and experiences (manifestation)? Aren't we back at the same old communicational model? Designation, manifestation, signification resurgent. Perhaps insurgent. But is this change enough?

The move to save change by breaking the symmetries at the basis of the propositional view of language has back-fired. They return, in conformity and correspondence, as if in confirmation of the doctrine that production is always actually, systematically, reproduction. If production is reproduction, then life is trapped in a vicious circle: that of the systemic repetition of its own formation (wholesale or in self-interested part). Still the initial emphasis has shifted from form, as mirrored or moulded, to formation. And it has done so in a framework that broadens the vistas of expression. It is no longer a question of language narrowly defined. It is also a question of extra-linguistic forces operating through language, as well as unspoken systems of signs (what the configuration of objects in the social field, and their patterns of accessibility, indirectly 'tells' the subject-in-the-making of its assigned position). As we will see in the course of this introduction, Deleuze and Guattari agree that the subject is in a sense spoken by extra-linguistic forces of expression, and that this impersonal speaking is not a matter of choice. But they do not see anything 'hidden' to uncover, nor are they willing to reduce the expressing individual to an instantiation of a system. From their perspective, the force of expression and the linguistically formed exercises of power it often fuels are painfully evident. The force of expression, however, strikes the body first, directly and unmediatedly. It passes transformatively through the flesh before being instantiated in subject-positions subsumed by a system of power. Its immediate effect is a differing. It must be made a reproduction. The body, fresh in the throes of expression, incarnates not an already-formed system but a modification – a change. Expression is an event. The ideological question of how to think open a space for change in a grid-locked positional system is turned on its head. The task for a theory of expression is how to account for stability of form, given event. The key is to remember that 'emergence, mutation, change affect composing forces, not composed forms' (Deleuze, 1988: 87).

A net on potential

Formation cannot be accounted for if a common form is assumed, whether between content and expression or subject and system. If the world exhibits conformities or correspondences they are, precisely, *produced*. To make them the principle of production is to confuse the composing with the composed, the process with the product. Deleuze and Guattari call this 'tracing' (*décalque*) (1987: 12–15). A tracing approach overlays the product onto the process, on the assumption that they must be structurally homologous. The assumption is that you can conceptually superimpose them to bring out a common logical outline. When this procedure is followed, product and process appear as versions of each other: copies. Production coincides with reproduction. Any potential the process may have had of leading to a significantly different product is lost in the overlay of what already is.

Deleuze and Guattari take a simple step that carries them a long way from this procedure: they say that there is more than one form. The cornerstone of their theories of expression, in their solo as well as collaborative writings, is the principle that contents and expressions do not share a form. They each have their own form (or forms). Loosely basing themselves on the work of the linguist Louis Hjelmslev, they contend that there are any number of forms of content and forms of expression, each with their own substance or specific materiality. The tricky part is that there is no form of forms to bridge the gap. Deleuze and Guattari do not make this move in order to ascend to some meta-level. Between a form of content and a form of expression there is only the process of *their passing into each other*: in other words, an immanence. In the gap between content and expression is the immanence of their mutual 'deterritorialization'. This blurring of the boundaries is *in addition to* their formal distinction.

In dialogue with Michel Foucault, they use the example of the prison (1987: 66–7). The prison itself is the form of content. Of course a prison building is not a prison without prisoners. The prisoners' bodies are the substance of content for the prison as form of content. Of course not only prisoners' bodies enter a prison, guards and visitors do also. A body in a prison is not a prisoner unless it has been condemned for a crime. The judge's pronouncement of guilt contributes a substance to the form of content. A verbal expression has, in effect, passed into content. The pronouncement of guilt is a performative use of language, defined as an utterance which transforms the attributes and physical conditions of a body or state of things simply by being said. The performative is a direct avenue for the passage of expression into content. Deleuze and Guattari argue that every use of language carries a certain performative force, if only because it presupposes a conventional context of intelligibility, and that conventional girding brings pressure to bear toward a certain manner of response. Every utterance is an 'order-word' in the sense that it moulds, subtly or directly, the potential

actions of its addressees. This 'moulding' by language is very different from the mirror-like moulding of the communicational model. There is no resemblance between a pronouncement of guilt and an imprisonment. The performative relation of the expression to its content is not representational. The performative is a speech *act* which modifies the target body's own potential for action: it is an action on an action. As in the ideological model, the content is actively modified by expression. It is also not without return channels for affecting expression. However, whatever back-action there may be does not set in motion a dialectic. The reciprocal actions of content and expression have to pass a gap of non-resemblance which breaks not only the symmetry between content and expression assumed by the communicational model, but also the polarity on which ideological models' dialectical method is based. What happens in the break is the crux of the matter for Deleuze and Guattari.

The pronouncement of guilt is not the form of expression for the prison regime, but a linguistic contributor to its content. What then is the form of expression? What it is decidedly not, according to Foucault, is the meaning of the word 'prison'. Construing it that way limits expression once again to the conceptual or semantic level of designation, manifestation and signification, entirely missing the 'action on action', the direct, mutual involvement of language and extra-linguistic forces. In Foucault's analysis in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), as read by Deleuze and Guattari, the form of expression for which the prison is the form of content is 'delinquency'. The actions in the social field leading to the emergence of the modern prison system were most effectively expressed in a varied and widespread discourse on delinquency, not through philosophical or semantic reflections on the meaning of 'prison'. There was no essential connection between delinquency as form of expression and the prison as form of content. There is no logical or teleological reason why that particular articulation had to be. Its power was the cumulative result of a thousand tiny performative struggles peppered throughout the social field. The connection was *made*, and it was made collectively, under the control of no individual subject.

As aggregate formations, expression-content articulations have a tendency to drift over time. 'Delinquency' would subsequently migrate, extending to a new form of content: the school. The school-form owed not a little to the strategies of containment implemented in the prison. Content and expression were re-articulating themselves, toward a new aggregate result. How it would all re-crystallize into a functioning system of power was at no point a foregone conclusion. Which content elements would make the migration? How would they re-couple with what expressive elements? What new expressions might pass over into content? Which might cease to? What elements from forms of expression other than delinquency and forms of content other than the prison would make contributions to the mix? Another thousand tiny struggles. For a re-articulation of this kind to eventuate, for anything new to

arise in the social field, established forms of content and expression must give of themselves. They shed functions, like so many seeds in search of new soil, or like branches for the grafting. It is of their cobbled-together nature to do so: to disseminate. And it is the inconstant nature of their sheddings to mutate as they disseminate. This mutational dissemination of transplantable functions is an instance of what Deleuze and Guattari call a 'deterritorialization'.

The point for Deleuze and Guattari is that in the drift of power formations 'there exist *intermediate states* between content and expression, expression and content ... through which a stratified system passes' (1987: 44). The system of established articulations passes into a mutational gap-state, filled with shed functions fallen free from their former implantations.⁸ A deterritorialized function is no longer a function in the normal sense. What can you do with something that hasn't yet decided if it is to fall back in on the side of content or expression? What aim or object can it have as yet? What meaning? Nothing determinate. The articulatory sheddings are functions without the determinate functioning they will come to have: in a state of potential. Deleuze and Guattari call articulatory functions in an in-between state of mutational potential 'particles' of expression or 'assignifying signs'. If there is no individual subject capable of governing their drift, then what determines where they fall and what they grow into? What determines how they recombine and settle into an actual functioning as part of a new articulation or 'regime of signs'? Deleuze and Guattari call the orchestrator of expression the 'abstract machine'.

The 'machine' is abstract because the assignifying signs with which it concerns itself lack determinate form or actual content definition. Though abstract, they are not unreal. They are in transport. They constitute the dynamic 'matter' of expression. When they settle into rearticulation, they become 'substances': formed, functional elements of either content (a prisoner, for example) or expression (a phoneme perhaps). Deleuze and Guattari's matter of expression correlates with Hjelmslev's 'purport' (for which the French translation is *matière*). Purport, Hjelmslev writes, 'has no possible existence except through being substance for one form or another' (1969: 52)⁹ It has no existence – only dynamic potential. It *comes into* existence through its capture by a content-expression articulation, as in a 'net'. Hjelmslev emphasizes the 'arbitrary' nature of this process. What is 'arbitrary' about it is the oddness of a quarry whose species does not preexist its capture, a prey whose determinate existence results from the casting of the hunter's net. Deleuze and Guattari do not favour the term arbitrary. It has too wan a logical ring for such an ontologically fraught struggle. From a Deleuze–Guattarian perspective, it would be better to say that the actual content of expression – what effectively comes to be signified, manifested, designated; its 'object' – *emerges* from expressive potential through a process of the capture of that potential, and that this emergence into being-determinate necessarily crosses a zone of systemic indeterminacy by virtue of which the whole affair is tinged with a

passing element of chance. To the logical ring of the arbitrary, Deleuze and Guattari respond with a contingent tinge to the emergent.

The primacy of expression

'There is a primacy of the collective assemblage of enunciation over language and words' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 90). The 'collective assemblage of enunciation' is the prong of the abstract machine that settles asignifying signs back into a functional form of expression (the 'machinic assemblage of bodies' is the prong that does the same for content). It is not only the emphasis on the collective nature of the process that is worth remarking. More radically, Deleuze and Guattari are suggesting that there is an impersonal expressive agency that is not only not restricted to language, but whose process takes precedence over its operations. Expression is not in a language-using mind, or in a speaking subject *vis à vis* its objects. Nor is it rooted in an individual body. It is not even in a particular institution, because it is precisely the institutional system that is in flux. Expression is abroad in the world – where the potential is for what may become. It is non-local, scattered across a myriad struggles over what manner of life-defining nets will capture and contain that potential in reproducible articulations, or actual functions. Determinate minds, subjects, bodies, objects, and institutions are the result. The subject, its embodiment, the meanings and objects it might own, the institutions that come to govern them, these are all conduits through which a movement of expression streams. Expression adopts them for its temporary forms and substances, towards its own furtherance, in ongoing self-redefinition. 'The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive' (1987: 316).

It was a moral precept of a certain era that one must 'own' one's enunciative position. An imperative was issued to speak responsibly from personal experience. But if expression is abroad in the world, it is not fundamentally ownable. It may well be morally domesticatable under certain conditions – many a moralizing capture through the ages attests to this – but only secondarily. 'The "first" language, or rather the first determination of language, is "*indirect discourse*" – expression that finally cannot be attributed to a particular speaker. "Language is not content to go from a first party to a second party, from one who has seen to one who has not, but necessarily goes from a second party to a third party, neither of whom has seen"' (1987: 76–7). Expression is always on the move, always engrossed in its own course, overflowing individual experience, nomadically evading responsibility. It is self-transporting, serially *across* experiences. 'There is a self-movement of expressive qualities' that momentarily crystallizes into actual objects and associated subject positions: 'expressive qualities are auto-objective' (1987: 317). Expression is captured in passing by its auto-objectifications, but only ever provisionally. In C.S. Peirce's terms, it operates in the element of

'thirdness': already included in every passage from one to another is a potential relay to a third. Even as expression settles into a particular articulation, it is already extending what Deleuze and Guattari call 'probe-heads' to a next, as-yet unknown destination: already shedding of itself, in the interests of its moving on.¹⁰ Expression's self-movement is a continual stretch. Expression is tensile.

'To express is not to depend upon; there is an autonomy of expression'.
(1987: 317)

What expression is most emphatically not dependent upon in the first instance is any purportedly generally applicable moral rule assigning responsibility for it or toward it. There is indeed an ethics of expression, which Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge and accept as a central problem. They insist on the term 'ethics', as opposed to morality, because the problem in their eyes is not in any primary fashion that of personal responsibility. It is a basically pragmatic question of how one *performatively* contributes to the stretch of expression in the world – or conversely prolongs its capture. This is fundamentally a *creative* problem. Where expression stretches, potential determinately emerges into something new. Expression's tensing is by nature creative. Its passing brings into definite being. It is *ontogenetic*. To tend the stretch of expression, to foster and inflect it rather than trying to own it, is to enter the stream, contributing to its probings: this is co-creative, an aesthetic endeavour. It is also an ethical endeavour, since it is to ally oneself with change: for an ethics of emergence. The English translators of Guattari's last work were right to subtitle its project an 'ethico-aesthetic paradigm'.¹¹

Stretch to intensity

Pragmatically, an ethics of expression involves producing 'atypical expressions'.

The atypical expression constitutes a cutting edge of deterritorialization of language, it plays the role of *tensor*; in other words, it causes language to tend toward the limit of its elements, forms, or notions, toward a near side or beyond of language. The tensor effects a kind of transitivity of the phrase, causing the last term to react upon the preceding term, back through the entire chain. It assures an intensive and chromatic treatment of language.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 99)

'Agrammaticality' brings out the tensile dimension of language by stretching its elements beyond the limit of their known forms and conventional functions. The atypical expression pulls language into a direct contact with its own futurity. It forcibly twists it into glints of forms, hints of contents, as-yet func-