Deleuze & Guattari for Architects

Andrew Ballantyne

Thinkers for Architects

THINKERS FOR ARCHITECTS

Deleuze and Guattari

for

Architects

Andrew Ballantyne

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Architects have often looked to philosophers and theorists from beyond the discipline for design inspiration or in search of a critical framework for practice. This original series offers quick, clear introductions to key thinkers who have written about architecture and whose work can yield insights for designers.

Deleuze and Guattari for Architects

Andrew Ballantyne

Heidegger for Architects

Adam Sharr

Irigaray for Architects

Peg Rawes

To Peter, Joanna and Penelope Klein

Series Editor's Preface

Adam Sharr

Architects have often looked to thinkers in philosophy and theory for design ideas, or in search of a critical framework for practice. Yet architects and students of architecture can struggle to navigate thinkers' writings. It can be daunting to approach original texts with little appreciation of their contexts and existing introductions seldom explore architectural material in any detail. This original series offers clear, quick and accurate introductions to key thinkers who have written about architecture. Each book summarizes what a thinker has to offer for architects. It locates their architectural thinking in the body of their work, introduces significant books and essays, helps decode terms and provides quick reference for further reading. If you find philosophical and theoretical writing about architecture difficult, or just don't know where to begin, this series will be indispensable.

Books in the *Thinkers for Architects* series come out of architecture. They pursue architectural modes of understanding, aiming to introduce a thinker to an architectural audience. Each thinker has a unique and distinctive ethos, and the structure of each book derives from the character at its focus. The thinkers explored are prodigious writers and any short introduction can only address a fraction of their work. Each author – an architect or an architectural critic – has focused on a selection of a thinker's writings which they judge most relevant to designers and interpreters of architecture. Inevitably, much will be left out. These books will be the first point of reference, rather than the last word, about a particular thinker for architects. It is hoped that they will encourage you to read further; offering an incentive to delve deeper into the original writings of a particular thinker.

The first three books in the series explore the work of: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; Martin Heidegger; and Luce Irigaray. Familiar cultural figures, these are thinkers whose writings have already influenced architectural designers and

critics in distinctive and important ways. It is hoped that this series will expand over time to cover a rich diversity of contemporary thinkers who have something to say to architects.

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Peter Klein introduced me to Deleuze and Guattari's work in London in 1982. We were in a bookshop, and there was a pile of remaindered copies of the first American edition of *Anti-Oedipus*, which he drew to my attention, astonished to see it there. Even at the knock-down price it seemed expensive for an impulse-buy.

'Is it good?' I asked.

'What can I say?' he said, '. . . It changed my life.'

Andrew Ballantyne
Asquins
1 January 2007

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Who?

No longer ourselves

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari worked together on several books, and worked separately on many more. Their best known work stretched across two volumes with the title *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* – volume 1, *Anti-Oedipus* (1972); volume 2, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). Separately Deleuze (1925–95) was a professional philosopher, and Guattari (1930–92) was a psychiatrist and political activist. When they collaborated, their individual voices cannot be separated out and they seem to dissolve into one another. Sometimes the writing shifts into a new register as a *persona* is briefly adopted in order to give an impression of what the topic looks like from a particular point of view – but these points of view can seem bizarrely idiosyncratic – the point of view of a molecule, a moviegoer, or a sorcerer. 'The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together,' they said, 'Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, 3). Personal identity here is something that is taken up, and then dropped or reformulated, so who were they really, these slippery characters? How would we say who they were? More importantly, why would we want to know? And if, at some point, we felt that we knew who they were, then what would it be that we would know? Their aim, they say, is 'to reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I.' The question 'who?' simply will not arise;

. . . if, at some point, we felt that we knew who they were, then what would it be that we would know?

nevertheless for the time being they have kept their names 'out of habit, purely out of habit', but then disconcertingly they conclude: 'We are no longer ourselves.' Whatever people say they are, that's what they're not. Here, on the

opening page of *A Thousand Plateaus*, is a succinct but determined challenge to our usual habits of thought, and it seems to derive from two principal sources: Guattari's work with psychiatric patients, and Deleuze's philosophical habits of mind, looking for rigorous logic while setting aside the common-sense expectations that would normally deflect us from following the logic through to its conclusions. There is often a role for common sense in our lives, and Deleuze and Guattari notice themselves using it for example when they signed their book with their own names. 'It's nice to talk like everyone else, to say that the sun rises, when everybody knows it's only a manner of speaking' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, 3).

It's nice to talk like everyone else, to say that the sun rises, when everybody knows it's only a manner of speaking.

Of course the sun rises – with our own eyes we can see it happening, if we go at dawn to a place with a distant horizon in the east. Nevertheless we know that the earth orbits the sun, and from a more sophisticated point of view the 'sunrise' is a very limited earth-bound description – pedestrian, commonplace, but often the most useful thing to say. How pedantic it would sound to insist on any other description in a normal social gathering. It might be exhilarating to sense oneself at that moment watching a static sun while the earth turned so as to allow a clearer view of it, riding Spaceship Earth, but probably that is something to do as a private act of the imagination. If the thought occurs to me while I'm standing in a queue at a bus stop, then it's not a thought I'm going to share with the person standing next to me. I would go for a commonplace remark about the sunrise. If a stranger turned to me and started talking about 'Spaceship Earth', then I would start to react, I think, by feeling anxious.

Character-defining questions

If I try to explain who Deleuze and Guattari were, then I start by trying to think about the character-defining things they did. And what they did – so far as their international audience is concerned – was to present new ways of conceptualizing things. There are other ways of saying who someone is.

John Berendt wrote the novel *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, set in Savannah, Georgia; and he put it very succinctly. According to one of his acquaintances in Savannah, 'If you go to Atlanta, the first question people will ask you is, "What's your business?" In Macon they ask, "Where do you go to church?" In Augusta they ask your grandmother's maiden name. But in Savannah the first question people ask you is "What would you like to drink?"' (Berendt, 1994, 30–31). The answers to these questions are identity-defining. If my grandmother is not someone who is known in Augusta then I too am nobody: I can buy things in the shops, and eat in the restaurants, but it is to be expected that I will never fully establish myself personally as part of that society, but if I have grandchildren then they might make it.

. . . in Savannah the first question people ask you is 'What would you like to drink?'

If I go to Atlanta without any business to declare, then again apparently I am nobody (even if my grandmother was born there). Even in Georgia things are not so clearly defined that these rules would always hold. However the answers hardly matter: the important point for the story is that the questions themselves define the identities of the places where they are asked. Atlanta is *nouveau-riche*, Augusta is snobbish, Savannah is hedonistic; or so we might suppose from the characterization. This is how one's identity is determined, and equally how we disappear from view if we cannot lay claim to an identity that is recognizable. However it is not only in different places, or in different historical epochs that different identity-defining questions come to the fore. Genealogies are identity-defining in aristocratic societies with hereditary titles and roles – for princes and the nobility of course, even today – but even the librarians' posts at Versailles were hereditary, and much lower down the social scale there was often something similar but less legalistic going on. In a very stable society that does not change from one generation to the next, for reasons that feel more practical than ideological, the person best placed to learn the skills of a shoemaker or a joiner might be the craftsman's son, who had access to the workshop, and the most complete trust of the owner of the business, his father. A skilled artisan's son would be the person most likely to

succeed him in his business. So the boy's parentage would seem to be an important and character-defining thing about him. In the twenty-first century there is more spatial and social mobility than there was even 50 years ago, and the tracing of personal genealogies has never been more popular. We feel, when we find out something about our forebears, that we have learnt something about ourselves. Even when we have thoroughly uprooted ourselves and are working in places that our relatives do not know, and in ways that they do not understand, personal genealogy reasserts itself on family occasions.

Both identities are real. They are both roles that she knows how to play.

A woman who runs an international company and has hundreds of employees to do her bidding at the office, is redescribed for the family occasion as somebody's daughter, or somebody's aunt, and that is her identity for the duration. Both identities are real. They are both roles that she knows how to play. We have different ways of saying who someone is, and the way that we use will depend on the company we're in, or on the occasion. So it is correct to say, for example, that Gilles Deleuze was the husband of Fanny, and the father of Julien and Emilie, but what is that to us? It sounds overly gossipy even to have mentioned it. It would be correct to say that Deleuze was a good tennis player, and a bad driver, but these details are unimportant to us now that no one will be in a position to play tennis with him, or politely to decline the offer of a lift. There is a tendency in biographical writing to suppose that when we see the subject off guard, intimately, perhaps behaving badly, then we see the person in their truest light, as if there is an innermost identity that is really and truly our personal identity when all the public identities have fallen away, and

Identity is political, in that it is generated through our relations with others.

which we would do our best to keep hidden. Deleuze and Guattari resist that idea. Identity is political, in that it is generated through our relations with others.

It is not altogether interior, but has an external aspect. Our various temporary identities are all the identities we have, and depending on the point that we are addressing, the pertinent identity is the one – or maybe more than one – that has a bearing on the case. So if we are reading Deleuze's philosophy, it is beside the point how well he drove his car or looked after his nails.[1] And if I try to explain who Deleuze and Guattari were, then I cannot succinctly explain what was their innermost essence, and move on to other matters. What I have to do is to say what they did, and one of the things that they did was to make the idea of identity problematic. They were *by definition* the people who did those things – that is their identity for our purposes. And so far as I am concerned, what is interesting about them are the ideas that they formulated and wrote down. Their identity here is as authors of texts and creators of concepts, and it will assemble itself gradually as we see something of those texts and concepts below.

. . . for the kind of architect who wants to be stimulated into extending the range of what life has to offer, Deleuze and Guattari's attitudes will immediately be congenial.

These texts and concepts are never an end in themselves. They are deliberately experimental, and the point of them is always to see what might be turned up that could bring about new possibilities in living. In this stance we see that there is a link with a certain sort of architect – the sort who wants to design buildings that promote life and that are experiments in living. There are other sorts of architects, and other sorts of thinkers, who would adopt a different approach, and they will find Deleuze and Guattari's writings unappealing; but for the kind of architect who wants to be stimulated into extending the range of what life has to offer, Deleuze and Guattari's attitudes will immediately be congenial – even if it may take a little longer to make sense of their concepts.

Lines of flight

Part of the problem that one faces in trying to write about the things that really matter is that we have to be in one state of mind to experience the things that