

REVOLUTIONARY DESIRE IN DELEUZE AND GUATTARI

[Deleuze ve Guattari'de Devrimci Arzu]

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ÖZET

Anti-Ödipus: Kapitalizm ve Şizofreni (1972), son yüzyıl içinde siyaset teorisi ve felsefesi alanlarında yazılmış, en etkileyici, kışkırtıcı, anlaşılması güç ve zorlu kitaplardan biridir. Gilles Deleuze ve Félix Guattari, bu kitapta, arzu politikasını ve arzu üretim sürecini felsefi soruşturmalarının merkezine alarak; psikanalizden siyasete, ekonomiden tarihe ve dilbilimden felsefeye modern kapitalist toplumla ilişkili bir dizi soruna değinmişlerdir. Bu yazıda, ikilinin, şizoanaliz adını verdikleri ve alternatif bir psikanaliz teorisi ve pratiği geliştirmeye çalıştıkları söz konusu kitaplarına odaklanılacaktır. Makale, düşünürlerin arzu anlayışlarının detaylı bir resmini sunmayı ve kendinden devrimci bir arzu mefhumunu esas aldıklarından ciddi bir açmaz ile karşı karşıya olduklarını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, arzu politikası, psikanaliz, şizoanaliz.

ABSTRACT

Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1972) is one of the most influential, provocative, perplexing and forceful books to have been written in the field of political theory and philosophy in the last century. In this book, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari by situating the politics of desire and the process of the production of desire at the centre of their philosophical investigation, address a range of questions from psychoanalysis to politics, economics to history, and linguistics to philosophy with regard to modern capitalist society. This paper focuses on this book in which they attempt to develop an alternative theory and practice of psychoanalysis which they called schizoanalysis. The aim of the article is to provide a detailed picture of their conception of desire

and show that they face a serious dilemma since their view is based on an inherently revolutionary concept of desire.

Keywords: Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, politics of desire, psychoanalysis, schizoanalysis

Introduction

Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) is one of the most influential, provocative, perplexing and forceful books to have been written in the field of political theory and philosophy in the last century. Some authors even see the book as the modern counterpart of Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Antichrist* (Bogue, 1989, p. 83). In this book, Deleuze and Guattari by situating the micropolitics of desire and the process of the production of desire at the centre of their philosophical investigation, address a range of questions from psychoanalysis to politics, economics to history, and linguistics to philosophy with regard to modern capitalist society. Drawing on Michel Foucault's critique of power, the authors look for the way in which they can formulate a standpoint to resist power from a micro-political perspective.

In this paper, I will focus on this book in general. I believe that it is very important, first of all, to discuss philosophical underpinnings of the concept of desire. Thus, I am going to start with a conceptual introduction in order to explain Deleuze and Guattari's consideration of desire. I also believe that it is possible to misunderstand *Anti-Oedipus* if we cannot see the theory that the book is opposed, the Freudian theory of desire. Therefore, I am going to make a comparison between the Freudian notion of psychoanalysis and Deleuze and Guattari's alternative to psychoanalysis which they called schizoanalysis and show that they face a serious dilemma since their view is based on an inherently revolutionary concept of desire.

I

The concept of desire has been a radical concern for Western thought from the outset. Plato, for instance, by associating desire to the appetitive part of the soul, interpreted it by means of a void in a subject which is filled by the acquisition of an object in a negative way (Widder, 2010, p. 372; Bogue, 1989, p. 89). Following Plato, many Western philosophers and psychoanalysts considered desire in terms of 'lack' or 'absence'. During the long period from ancient Greek to the Enlightenment, the Platonic consideration of desire remained almost the same in Western philosophical tradition until Spinoza and Nietzsche. Spinoza, however, understood desire to be "striving together with consciousness of striving" (LeBuffe, 2014, n.p), by claiming that "nothing can be destroyed except by an external cause, attributes to the essence of all things a '*conatus*', affirmative force that strives to enhance the thing's power and sustain its existence" (Widder, 2010, p. 373). After Spinoza, Nietzsche maintained a similar consideration of the affirmative nature of

desire. According to Nietzsche, “desires and strivings express a will to power that seeks only to discharge its strength against resistances” (ibid.). Nietzsche, in this respect, attacked the negative conception of desire linking it by ‘slave mentality’ (Bogue, 1989, p. 89). What Deleuze and Guattari adopt is this Spinozistic as well as Nietzschean notion of desire, which is an affirmative physical force (Holland, 2005, p. 54).

Yet, it is important to say that Deleuze and Guattari in their conceptualization of desire, where desire is productive as well as creative, are more indebted to Nietzsche than to Spinoza. Indeed, by the notion of ‘desiring-machine’ they particularly refer to Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ (Sarup, 1993, p. 97; Massumi, 1996, p. 82). In this sense, “desire [...] is will-to-power, and always invests a greater degree of development of power-provided we recognise that greater power is always the product of a social assemblage” (Holland, 2008, p. 76). From this position, Deleuze and Guattari criticise the negative conception of desire found within Western philosophy in general and within the Freudian psychoanalysis in particular (Adkins, 2007, p. 129). According to them, the main problem with Western philosophy and the Freudian psychoanalysis is its negative notion of desire that is desire as a void:

...the traditional logic of desire is all wrong from the very outset: from the very first step that the Platonic logic of desire forces us to take, making us choose between production and acquisition. From the moment that we place desire on the side of acquisition, we make desire an idealistic (dialectical, nihilistic) conception, which causes us to look upon it as primarily a lack: a lack of an object, a lack of the real object (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000, p. 25).

However, for them, as opposed to the Platonic and the Freudian approaches, desire is neither an acquisition nor a lack but the positive dissemination of flows (Baudrillard, 2007, p. 35). Therefore, it cannot be defined in an idealistic way from a Plato-Freudian perspective (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 86; Bell, 2003, p. 6). It is even possible to say that desire is more than the actuality (Colebrook, 2002, p. 82). As Young, Genosko and Watson (2013, p. 80) argued “desire is, instead, ‘*continuous*’ and therefore connective and productive by nature”. For this reason, it can be better understood as a kind of dynamic-machine, like Nietzschean ‘will to power’ which is an unbound, unlimited free-flowing physical energy that allows free movement (Bogue, 1989, p. 89; Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 86-87).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the main task for a society, either in the form of despotic or capitalist, has always been to repress and dominate desire, to *territorialize* within its closed system: “to code desire—and the fear, the anguish of decoded flows—is the business of the socius” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000, p. 139). For them, even socialization is just a process of this flow:

We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. *There is only desire and the social, and nothing else* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000, p. 38).

It is precisely for this reason that “the deterritorialization of the socius [...] constitutes the most characteristic and the most important tendency of capitalism” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000, p. 34). According to Deleuze and Guattari, the form of desire found within a society also determines its structure. For them, there are two kinds of desire and society: the paranoid and the schizophrenic. The paranoid and the schizophrenic desires signal two different sides of *delires*. Paranoid desire is totalitarian, whereas schizophrenic desire is liberating. Paranoid society is a society that is built on the authoritarian structures and hierarchal borderlines. However, schizophrenic society contains small horizontal communities that have no hierarchy (Sarup, 1993, p. 93).

What Deleuze and Guattari maintain is this schizophrenic form of desire, which will liberate the individual, as well as society, from the repression of capitalism. Despite the fact that “they by no means identify themselves as Marxists and reject dialectical methodology for a postmodern logic of difference, perspectives, and fragments” (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 77-78), they believe that capitalism will inevitably produce “an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy or charge” leading to its own destruction and, through the process of desire production, capitalism will reach its limit (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000, p. 34). At this point, it is possible to say that Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of capitalism is, in a way, a critique of psychoanalysis and *vice versa*. Yet, by putting the notion desire at the centre of their investigation and overturning the Platonic and the Freudian conception of desire in relation to modern capitalism, they formulate an essentialist notion of desire, so called, ‘desire in itself’. This postulate is both problematic and dogmatic.

II

Deleuze and Guattari argue that psychoanalysis performs the ‘tyranny of signifier’ by introducing the concepts such as ‘representation’, ‘modern subject’ and so on (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 85). In this sense, psychoanalysis has transformed into a kind of ‘state religion’ (ibid.), and therapists has become ‘the watch-dog of the modern state’ (Sarup, 1993, p. 94). However, it is important to say that Deleuze and Guattari do not completely reject the glossary of psychoanalysis, in fact, they use a number of psychoanalytic concepts such as ‘primary and secondary repression’, ‘the ego’, ‘the drives’ and so on (Buchanan 2008, p. 65). Yet, they do not believe that they can “make the analytic machine into an indispensable part of the revolutionary machinery” with the help of psychoanalysis (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000, p. 82). For them, psychoanalysis encodes ‘Lack’, ‘Culture’ and ‘Law’ on the unconscious, and therefore structuralises and represses the productive aspect of desire (Sarup, 1993, p. 94). In other words, the tyranny of the signifier is *the very principle of despotic overcoding* and one of the clearest manifestations of this dominance is psychoanalysis (Guattari, 1990, p. 21). For this reason, as opposed to the process of encoding they attempt to find a theoretical compromise between psychoanalysis and Marxism in order to formulate an affirmative alternative to psychoanalysis, which they define as a revolutionary materialist psychiatry. According to Buchanan, in order to achieve this aim two things are crucial: first of all, to “introduce desire into the conceptual mechanism used to understand social production and reproduction, making it part of the very infrastructure of daily life”; secondly, “to introduce the notion of production into the concept of desire, thus removing the artificial boundary separating the machinations of desire from the realities of history” (Buchanan 2008, p. 39).

Schizoanalysis, as a positive alternative to psychoanalysis, attempts to make a *decentralized* and *fragmented* analysis of all the *unconscious investments* in a society, problematizes the logic of the flow of desire and shows how the subjects became a part of hierarchical structures in which they repress their own desires: “whereas psychoanalysis neuroticizes, producing subjects who conform to authority and law and are repressed in their desire, schizoanalysis schizophrenicizes, opening up the lines of movement of desire away from hierarchical and socially imposed forms” (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 90-91). In this sense, schizoanalysis is neither a political program nor a recipe for revolution. They do not suggest a general method for a political resistance, but, rather their intention is to design schizoanalysis as a ‘weapon’ that “deconstructs modern binaries and breaks with

modern theories of the subject, representational modes of thought, and totalizing practices” (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 85-86).

Orthodox psychiatry sees insanity as a deficiency of the mind. Yet, Deleuze and Guattari see madness as an opportunity to overthrow capitalist society. From a quite different point of view, the most important reason why they evaluate schizophrenia as a starting point is that schizophrenics do not distinguish between personal and social experiences: for the schizophrenic, to say and to act are one and the same thing. Thus, the relationship between word and action, wish and act is direct and immediate (Sarup, 1993, p. 95-96):

It might be said that the schizophrenic passes from one code to the other, that he deliberately scrambles all the codes, by quickly shifting from one to another, according to the questions asked him, never giving the same explanation from one day to the next, never invoking the same genealogy, never recording the same event in the same way (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000, p. 15).

In this sense, for liberation, one must apply schizophrenia to politics. From this point of view, it can be said that what Deleuze and Guattari develop is a politics of schizophrenia (Sarup, 1993, p. 96). In order to develop such a theory and practice, Deleuze and Guattari state that, in the first place, desire must be at the centre, since desire is revolutionary in nature (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000, p. 118). For them, what capitalist power cannot endure is revolutionary potential of desire and only desire can overturn capitalism. Since, desire “always seeks more objects, connections, and relations than any other socius can allow, pursuing ‘*nomadic and polyvocal*’ rather than ‘*segregative and biunivocal*’ flows” (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 86).

Yet, despite the fact that Deleuze and Guattari introduce the new non-authoritarian ways of thinking in *Anti-Oedipus* (Newman, 2001, p. 110), they do not clarify how ‘desiring machines’ can be gathered together for a revolution of desire and what some of the concrete characteristics of this revolutionary movement would be (Neil, 2012, p. 17). Indeed, in the concluding pages of *Anti-Oedipus* they state that their intention is not to offer a revolutionary model to be followed by the masses. On the contrary, they put forward that if we grasp the meaning of the notion of desire properly and “distinguish it effectively from interest then the revolution is already made” (Buchanan, 2008, p. 2). However, Deleuze and Guattari’s consideration of desire sits uneasily

astride when we think about Baudrillard's critique of both Deleuze and Guattari's notion of revolutionary desire. In Deleuze and Guattari's work, "desire's reversion into its own repression is inexplicable" (Baudrillard, 2007, p. 49). As Baudrillard points out, if desire is such an affirmative, productive and liberating force, this raises the question of *how is it possible to repress desire in the first place?* In addition to that, by assuming 'desire is revolutionary in its essence', they construct, so to speak, a kind of metaphysics that supports affirmative desire. In this respect, the concept of desire remains essentialist (Best and Kellner, 1991; Newman, 2001). Although, they reject every kind of universal discourse and modern subject theories by making a deconstruction of modern dichotomies, they consider desire to be a universal concept that has always existed. Furthermore, they employ an essentialist conception of desire by assuming that it is quintessentially revolutionary:

Despite what some revolutionaries think about this, *desire is revolutionary in its essence* [...] and no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised. [...] Desire does not "want" revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right, as though involuntarily, by wanting what it wants (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 118; *emphasis added*).

In this respect, their consideration of desire "as constituting a revolutionary outside to power" reaffirms the essentialism that they reject in their philosophical project in general (Newman, 2001, p. 97). By considering a notion of desire as revolutionary in its substance, Deleuze and Guattari fall back into 'a tree-structured segmentation' which they seek to reject through 'rhizomatic thought' (ibid., p. 110). It is precisely for this reason that they are in a serious dilemma in their conceptualization of the politics of desire.

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