

**SUICIDE**  
**Some Questions In Memoriam Gilles Deleuze**

*Steve Sweeney-Turner*

Desired from within, death always comes from without in a passive and accidental form. Suicide is an attempt to make the two incommensurable faces coincide or correspond. However, the two sides do not meet, and every death remains double.<sup>[1]</sup>

For the early Deleuze of *Difference and Repetition*, suicide is coined with two faces - yet, it is a curved coin suggesting the axis of internality-externality. This is a suicide thought within the field of Freud's death drive, and we should be clear about the distinction between Freud's concept and death as such. For Deleuze, the death drive initially encompasses originary repetition - closed, teleological, dialectical. It represents not merely the desire to die, but also the desire to control death:

Freud suggested the following hypothesis: the organism wants to die, but to die in its own way, so that real death always presents itself as a foreshortening, as possessing an accidental, violent and external character which is anathema to the internal will-to-die.<sup>[1]</sup>

In fact, there is a 'necessary non-correspondence' between the internal desire of the organism to *die in its own way*, and the external fact of 'real', unsolicited death - these are the 'two sides' of the currency of death, the *desire from within* against the *accidental form without*. Suicide, then, is the attempt to bring about a correspondence between these two deaths: the driven desire and the external accident, the 'transcendental principle' and the 'empirical event'.<sup>[1]</sup>

Suicide as the attempt to reconcile opposing principles? Suicide as the practical expression of a dialectics of death? Because it's only by *default* - when Deleuze says 'however' - that the true impossibility of these two opposing principles emerges. For Deleuze's Freud, suicide is very much a dialectical mode of death, and it is only under deconstruction that we realise its fully double nature, and the possibility of a death drive which exceeds originary repetition and the dialectical absorption of empirical indeterminacy.

Yet despite this opening in suicide for a potential excess beyond closure, the figure of suicide nevertheless retains certain non-affirmative associations throughout Deleuze's work. For the later Deleuze of the double writing-machine Deleuze & Guattari, suicide returns in a further register. It is all a question of

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<sup>[1]</sup> Gilles Deleuze, trans. Paul Patton, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Athlone, 1994), p.259.

<sup>[2]</sup> op.cit.

<sup>[3]</sup> op.cit., pp.16 & 259.

destratification, and the care required to assemble one's procedure. There is an air of caution which pervades everything:

Staying stratified - organized, signified, subjected - is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever.<sup>[1]</sup>

Suicide and dementia are two figures of 'the worst that can happen'. Staying stratified, being organic, reading semiologically, remaining a classical subject, etc. - all of these may in fact be preferable to bringing about the suicidal collapse of the strata in which we (one presumes) begin. If we are to deterritorialize, we are not necessarily to do so universally, but in certain places at certain times. A question of cautious strategy.

For suicide has associations beyond dementia - associations which resonate at much deeper levels within the strata. In evading Freud (but we are still discussing him, are we not?) and placing ourselves, destratified, upon the plane of immanence or consistency, we must exercise vigilance, lest we resonate in sympathy with the very strata we wish to fly from:

distinguish... within desire between that which pertains to stratic proliferation, or else too-violent destratification, and that which pertains to the construction of the plane of consistency (keep an eye out for all that is fascist, even inside us, and also for the suicidal and the demented).<sup>[1]</sup>

So suicide has certain figurative associations not only with dementia, but also with fascism - as figures of 'the worst that can happen', they must be avoided. Their structures border on or stand within the field of dialectics, and as such present dangerous obstacles which we must navigate around carefully if we are to truly assemble the plane of immanence.

The association between suicide and fascism is not a passing one, however, and undergoes a series of intense repetitions:

A bizarre remark by Virilio puts us on the trail: in fascism, the State is far less totalitarian than it is *suicidal*. There is in fascism a realized nihilism... Suicide is presented not as a punishment but as the crowning glory of the death of others... a war machine that appropriates the State and channels it into a flow of absolute war whose only possible outcome is the suicide of the state itself.<sup>[1]</sup>

Suicide as an increasingly universalized self-immolation, Wagnerian sopranos on all sides flying into the funeral pyres of their phallic lover-gods; a *liebestod* with more than the odd meaty whiff of enforced burnings; an apocalyptic

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[4] Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, trans. Brian Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Athlone, 1988), p.161.

[5] *op.cit.*, p.165.

[6] *op.cit.*, p.230-231.

*götterdämmerung* which at once levels all difference and opens the possibility of beginning once again. And in all of this, we might imagine a suicide which signs the elision of two originary repetitions. Once more, a question of a doubling, but of what kind?

Suicide not only as a dialectical method, but also as coterminous with a negatively inscribed dementia? Moreover, suicide as the mechanism of a fascism (historically specific as that may be)? All of this undeniably resonates within the theatre of this European century, but only offers, for sure, an instance. Perhaps there are other uses to which we might put suicide, or at least the figure of suicide. After all, Deleuze & Guattari specifically encourage us to:

invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive.

Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections...<sup>[1]</sup>

A different form of suicide, then? A form of self-destruction which, rather than attempting to reconcile the internal desire for death to the external fact of death, evades the Freudian opposition between the principle and the event, the transcendental and the empirical? A form of 'dying in one's own way' which emerges affirmatively as an evasion of the death drive itself and of the transcendental controls it attempts to exert? A form of self-destruction which dislocates the concept of the Self - no doubt, but what of it?

The fact remains that we still have the figure of 'suicide, double suicide, a way out that turns the line of flight into a line of death.'<sup>[1]</sup> Suicide as the death of the line of flight, as the death of the attempt to escape dialectics, the death of the attempt to escape fascism. Suicide in fact turns the line of flight into a line of death - closure, the death of multiplicity, difference and movement, the attainment of a *telos* already known in the structure of an origin to be repeated without dislocation.

Definition of suicide - 'a way out that turns the line of flight into a line of death'? But what better sick joke on this passage could we hope for than for Deleuze himself to commit suicide by leaping from a window - line of flight in which one also dies? The famous photographic image of Yves Klein haunts the imagination here: the artist caught in mid-flight, emerging from the window moments before a death which never occurred in reality, no matter how much his death drive desired such a suicide. On the one hand, a simulacrum which precedes Deleuze's suicide, which maps the desire of such a suicide, and on the other, the fact of his actual suicide, gearing, perhaps, in dislocated connections with (and yet also despite) our own desiring. In an actual leap, one actively wills the line of flight into a line of death, a trajectory from the line which is all middle to the line which ends in a point. One wills a punctual system in suicide?

Might there not be something specifically anal about suicide, from a Freudian point of view? If there is, it would be the desire to control the 'empirical event', and could not this control so easily be turned to a very 'transcendental

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<sup>[7]</sup> op.cit., p.160.

<sup>[8]</sup> op.cit., p.229.

principle' indeed? And how might we read this in the context of Deleuze's delight in John Cage's music as precisely the release of the 'empirical event'? When confronted with the question of his own death and the desires which he might have about it, did not Cage realize exactly what was at issue here?

it's not a decision that I will be taking. It'll happen regardless of my desires and intentions. I'll just have to accept it however it happens.<sup>[1]</sup>

For Cage in death, as in music, one accepts the event, one accepts the accident, one accepts the principle of indeterminacy, even if this transposition from art to life is also qualified by a whimsical 'I wonder if I will...'.<sup>[1]</sup> The desire (as ever with Cage, ostensibly paradoxical) to suspend desire, the intention to have no intention, while risking (as does deconstruction) the transcendentalization of the avoidance of the transcendental, nevertheless leads to a practical acceptance of the empirical event in all of its heterogeneity and unpredictability. No anal retention here, no fascist anus compressing the *prima materia* of life into a perfect, golden turd which will never be left outside to chance the risks of theft or accident. With Cage, one's life-bowels loosen unpredictably in a gloriously un-planned fit of selfless diahorrea - a material distribution to map, perhaps, but definitely not to plan.

So how do we distinguish, in Deleuze's actual suicidal action, between an ostensibly final pun on a *line of flight* and his ominous warnings against reducing such deterritorializing actions to a *line of death*? Are we required to make a *leap of faith* here, or are we to reduce the whole field of our enquiry to the biography of an illness? Or are there other, more pressing questions to pose? Probably, but how *exactly* does Deleuze avoid the evident string of resonances which he sets up over and again between suicide and a negatively inscribed dementia, between suicide and fascist method (perhaps the easiest question to answer), and, perhaps most importantly, between suicide and dialectics? Deleuze's suicide raises these and other serious questions which have direct bearing on what we would conventionally call his 'life's work'.

None of this, of course, should necessarily be taken as an intimation that in moving through such questions, we will inevitably find Deleuze's 'final act' wanting a certain 'authentically Deleuzean' polish. The purpose here is not to answer such questions, let alone map their terrain comprehensively. It does seem, however, that the time may have come when the text of suicide within Deleuze (taking that name as a corpus of philosophy or as a philosopher's corpse) could require a fuller interrogation than we previously might have suspected.

If, as Deleuze suggests in *Difference and Repetition*, the dialectic which suicide attempts to assemble within the Freudian scene nevertheless fails by default, then what antimemorial shall we build to celebrate the impossibility of the two

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[9] Steve Sweeney-Turner, 'John Cage and the Glaswegian Circus: an interview around Musica Nova 1990', in *Tempo* 177, June 1991, p.8.

[10] op.cit.

deaths - the one of desire and the other of accident - which Deleuze's own suicide reveals (or not)?

I hate the faculty of memory, I hate memories... *Becoming is an antimemory...*<sup>[1]</sup>

The corpse lies beneath the antimemorial. And we know that antimemory is not the opposite of memory, is not forgetting. Neither should we, in our antiforgetting, re-member this body without organs. There should be no embalming, no dressing of wounds, no taxidermy. Neither should there be a post-mortem - but of course, let us now open the body out even further. Not to locate the cause of death, but to map the event.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, op.cit., pp.297 & 294.