

POLYPHONY

No, this is not exactly silence,
hovering like a stentor menace,
the one not countenanced in years.
Opposite, an oily Dimplex sashes
to itself, timing our anxieties.
Tacit, a string quartet
elbows in a corked void,
bowless Bartók listenable only
in suave, improbable states.
Lath, frame and plaster creak,
then the demotic buzz of electricity,
a refrigerator changing key,
ushering its signature tune.
Downstairs, valetudinarian lungs
braid the chronic past. Nosing,
the methodical gut pursues
its dark destiny. Somewhere,
a last train, a young man
unchaining his bicycle. Whistling,
a neighbour spills his gourd of keys.
Still strangers after years,
we nod across the mural dark.
Sneezing with fright, a possum
arcs from a corrugated roof.
Something switches itself off.
And always, just a hand, a flame,
the loquacious prompt of the brain:
tedious, bitter, extravagant,
if not morose and sentimental,
that will be acknowledged
like a diva. Not exactly silence.

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MAKING A BETTER MYSTERY OUT OF HISTORY

Of Plateaus, Roads and Traces

GILBERT B. RODMAN

Conversation

If I could not read this book seriously as penetrating and coherent social theory, nor as an objective historical account (although it is exhaustively researched), I could take seriously its spirit and passion, which raises more questions than either theory or historicism can answer in their indifferent ways. When I finished the last page, I put on the Sex Pistols' songs and listen [sic] to them with new ears, and a bit of revived passion.

*Jon Erickson*¹

The question is not: is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body? The answer for some readers, perhaps most, will be 'none.' If that happens, it's not your tune. No problem. But you would have been better off buying a record.

*Brian Massumi*²

Brian Massumi is on the defensive. In concluding the foreword to the English-language edition of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, he seems to expect legions of readers to throw down the massive volume in disgust and frustration at the book's 'failure' to conform to traditional standards of truth and rationality. And while Jon Erickson's comments above come from a review of an altogether different and unrelated book (Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces*³), he seems to be precisely the sort of reader Massumi had in mind: a reader who believes scholarship should involve reason rather than passion, coherent narratives rather than discontinuous fragments, and logical chains of cause and effect rather than intuitive leaps between unconnected events. What I find most striking about these two statements, however, is that both Massumi and Erickson ultimately find themselves positing a hierarchical opposition between

'the book' and 'the record', where the latter ultimately serves as a (supposedly) poor substitute for readers dissatisfied with a difficult or challenging example of the former.

This similarity is probably just a coincidence, much as the jump Marcus makes in his book from Sex Pistols lead vocalist John Lydon (or Johnny Rotten) to the sixteenth-century heretic John of Leyden is an instance of serendipitous happenstance. As Marcus points out, however, 'serendipity is where you find it' (93), and what is at issue here is not whether the connections established are 'true', but whether or not the story implied by those connections 'works':

This story, if it is a story, doesn't tell itself; once I'd glimpsed its outlines, I wanted to shape the story so that every fragment, every voice, would speak in judgment of every other, even if the people behind each voice had never heard of the others. Especially if they hadn't; especially if, in 'Anarchy in the U.K.,' a twenty-year-old called Johnny Rotten had rephrased a social critique generated by people who, as far as he knew, had never been born. Who knew what else was part of the tale? If one can stop looking at the past and start listening to it, one might hear echoes of a new conversation; then the task of the critic would be to lead speakers and listeners unaware of each other's existence to talk to one another. The job of the critic would be to maintain the ability to be surprised at how the conversation goes, and to communicate that sense of surprise to other people, because a life infused with surprise is better than a life that is not. (23)

It is this project of leading 'speakers and listeners unaware of each other's existence to talk to one another' that motivates me to link together three seemingly unconnected books: Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, Marcus's *Lipstick Traces* and Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*.⁴ Each of these books covers vastly different subject matter – Deleuze and Guattari produce post-structuralist philosophy, Carter critiques the historical accounts of Anglo-Australian settlement, and Marcus maps out an anti-genealogy of continental avant-garde movements that dates back to the thirteenth century. But each book also attempts to tackle a nearly identical project, to describe what Marcus calls 'a new way of walking and a new way of talking' (398), and the solutions they arrive at are strikingly similar. That none of these authors appears to be familiar with the others' projects only makes it all the more surprising that they have separately arrived at nearly identical conclusions – a process that Deleuze and Guattari (quoting Rémy Chauvin) would call 'the *aparallel evolution* of two [or, in this instance, three] beings that have absolutely nothing to do with each other' (10).

Putting these three books together, it is possible to 'hear echoes

of a new conversation', a conversation with significant implications for the ways in which we engage in intellectual work. This dialogue may not provide us with an accurate picture of the world (whatever that might mean), but producing faithful representations of the world is precisely *not* the point behind either these books or this essay. More important is the way in which the conversation between these seemingly unconnected voices can help us not only to see the world from a different and, perhaps, more enlightening perspective, but also to change the ways in which we move through the world so that we, too, can develop a new way of walking and a new way of talking . . .

Plateau

We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes.⁵

Out of necessity this conversation begins with Deleuze and Guattari, whose book describes, in abstract terms, an approach to intellectual activity that Carter and Marcus independently take up. If the conversation between these three books is to make any sense at all, it is necessary to describe the theoretical demands that Deleuze and Guattari make before attempting to explain how Carter and Marcus translate that theory into practice.

I use the term 'demands' to describe Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical project because *A Thousand Plateaus* reads like a manifesto for a revolution in intellectual thought and practice:

Write to the n th power, the $n - 1$ power, write with slogans: Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots! Don't be one or multiple, be multiplicities! Run lines, never plot a point! Speed turns the point into a line! Be quick, even when standing still! (24)

These are not politely decorous requests or timid 'suggestions for further research', but bold commands for forceful action. If this is a call to revolution, then the despotism Deleuze and Guattari seek to overthrow is that of 'arborescent culture' – culture and thought based on the binary, genealogical model of the root–tree system, such as that found in the grammatical trees of Chomsky's linguistics:

the categorical S symbol that dominates every sentence . . . is more fundamentally a marker of power than a syntactic marker: you will construct grammatically correct sentences, you will divide each statement into a noun phrase and a verb phrase (first dichotomy . . .). (7)

Deleuze and Guattari's principal objection to the arborescent systems of thought that dominate Western culture is 'not that they are too abstract but, on the contrary, that they are not abstract enough' (7):

It is our view that genetic axis and profound structure are above all infinitely reproducible principles of *tracing*. All of tree logic is a logic of tracing and reproduction. . . . [The tracing] injects redundancies and propagates them. What the tracing reproduces of the map or rhizome are only the impasses, blockages, incipient taproots, or points of structuration. (12-13)

For Deleuze and Guattari, the root-tree model reduces the complexity of the world to a series of linear, genealogical, cause-and-effect relationships between an artificially isolated and self-contained set of positions. This form of reductionism is dangerous to effective intellectual thought. The real world, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is never as simple or as tidy as arborescent models make it out to be, and to pretend otherwise is to impose a repressively structured order on a decidedly un[der]structured reality.

In place of the weaknesses of the root-tree model, 'which plots a point, fixes an order', Deleuze and Guattari propose the alternative model of the rhizome, where 'any point . . . can be connected to anything other and must be' (7). In arborescent (or sedentary) thought, what is important is the points along a path rather than the path itself; lines are of significance only in that their existence is determined (and thus given significance) by their end points. For rhizomatic thought, however, the opposite is true:

although . . . points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. (380)

The rhizome, then, is not a tracing of these paths (such a tracing necessarily closes in upon itself, transforming those paths into a mere outline). Rather it is a map that

fosters connections between fields. . . . The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. . . . A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back 'to the same.' The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged 'competence.' (12-13)

By Deleuze and Guattari's own admission, their opposition of the rhizome to the tree is itself a problematic instance of arborescent

dualism. Outside the confines of their abstract argument there are few (if any) pure examples of either model: 'There are knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots' (20). The authors' use of the binary opposition between the rhizome-map and the tree-tracing is an effort to subvert arborescent culture from within: 'We invoke one dualism only in order to challenge another. We employ a dualism of models only in order to arrive at a process that challenges all models' (20).

This notion resonates strongly with what Deleuze and Guattari have elsewhere described as 'minor literature . . . that which a minority constructs within a major language':⁶

To make use of the polylingualism of one's own language, to make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape, an animal enters into things, an assemblage comes into play.⁷

Following this detour a bit further still, if we read *A Thousand Plateaus* as an example of 'minor literature', then Deleuze and Guattari's 'difficult' style of writing can be seen as an inevitable consequence of its minor nature:

A major, or established, literature follows a vector that goes from content to expression. . . . That which conceptualizes well expresses itself. But a minor, or revolutionary, literature begins by expressing itself and doesn't conceptualize until afterward. . . . Expression must break forms, encourage ruptures and new sproutings.⁸

It would thus be impossible for Deleuze and Guattari simply to present an explicit, step-by-step explanation of their rhizomatic project and still hope for it to succeed as a revolutionary work. The innovative nature of their book lies as much in its fragmented and discontinuous form as in its abstract and difficult content: 'There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made' (4).

Returning to the problem of implementing Deleuze and Guattari's model, if we accept that purely rhizomatic structures are an impossibility, then *A Thousand Plateaus* becomes (at the very least) a demand to incorporate the inevitable moments of arborescence into the rhizome: 'Plug the tracings back into the map, connect the roots or trees back up with a rhizome' (14). That we cannot escape arborescent thought altogether is no reason to give in to it wholeheartedly and exclusively.

The question still remains, however, as to how Deleuze and

Guattari's highly abstract notions can be put into practice. If we wish to respond to their rhizomatic manifesto sympathetically, what changes must we make in our ways of thinking, writing and doing research? How do we engage in (and not just talk about) a new way of walking and a new way of talking? There are no easy answers to this question, if for no other reason than that rhizomes, by definition, do not readily lend themselves to standardized models. There is no proved formula or set of rules for building a rhizome: 'The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers' (7). While responding to Deleuze and Guattari's demands does nothing to make our intellectual labours any easier, we should not let the difficulty of the task persuade us to abandon it. The approach that appears simplest is not necessarily the one that best addresses the questions at hand.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that, in arborescent culture, the book is seen to be – is *supposed* to be – an 'accurate' reflection (a tracing) of the universe it describes. The test for quality in such writing is thus the question that Massumi discards: 'Is it true?' 'The book as the image of the world', however, strikes Deleuze and Guattari as 'a vapid idea' (6):

[C]ontrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world; there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can). (11)

The book, then, is not *about* the world (or a portion thereof), nor is it written *by* an author (or set of authors):

There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders. (23)

In Marcus's terms, the book can be seen as an object engaged in conversation with both its author(s) and the world, rather than as an object somehow produced by either of these two terms.

Admittedly, this is still a rather abstract model of intellectual practice, as the question of how to write a book so that it will not be read as 'the image of the world' remains unanswered. Again, however, there are no simple answers to the methodological question, 'How does one construct a rhizome?' The very nature of the rhizome dictates that any answer to this question must be situationally specific, depending on the answers to a number of other

questions peculiar to the project at hand: Who is writing this book, and from what position(s) are they writing? What subject matter is under consideration? Who are the intended readers? And in what contexts – social, political, economic, historical and so on – is the book being researched, written and published?

There are no universal answers to these methodological questions. *The Road to Botany Bay* and *Lipstick Traces*, however, provide us with specific examples of how Deleuze and Guattari's abstract notions might be put into practice. For even if neither Carter nor Marcus draws directly upon Deleuze and Guattari's work, their books nevertheless respond to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic manifesto. A closer examination of these two books should help us to answer the methodological questions that Deleuze and Guattari leave as an exercise for their readers.

Road

Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come.

A Thousand Plateaus, 4–5

Both in form and content, *The Road to Botany Bay* is easily the most conventional of the three books under discussion here. In form, Carter's book most obviously differs from the others in that it consists of *chapters*. By way of contrast, *A Thousand Plateaus* is composed of *plateaus* ('A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end. A rhizome is made of plateaus.' (21)), *Lipstick Traces* is divided (at least formally) into two fragmented *versions* of the story Marcus wishes to tell. With respect to content, the latter two volumes are characterized by sudden leaps from one subject to another far removed in space and time, while Carter's book makes more gradual transitions from one topic to the next and generally stays within the broad limits of its subject: the European exploration and settlement of the Australian continent.

Nevertheless, *The Road to Botany Bay* resonates strongly with the rhizomatic project outlined in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In arguing for a new way of writing history (which he calls 'spatial history'), Carter takes strong exception to the ways in which historical accounts are conventionally written:

This kind of history, which reduces space to a stage, that pays attention to events unfolding in time alone, might be called imperial history . . . The primary object is not to understand or to interpret: it is to legitimate. This is why this history is associated with imperialism. (xvi)

Carter describes imperial historians as audience members seated in a

theatre while a predetermined narrative unfolds before them. Deleuze and Guattari make a similar argument that 'history is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads' (23). And Carter's topic *is* nomads. His terminology differs from that of Deleuze and Guattari but his hero figure, the explorer, bears a remarkable resemblance to their hero figure, the nomad.

For the nomad, travel is not a means to an end, but a whole way of life. Yet nomadism is not reducible to an aimless form of wandering from point to point. As Deleuze and Guattari put it,

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. . . . The life of the nomad is the intermezzo. . . . The nomad is not at all the same as the migrant; for the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized. But the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity; in principle, points for him are relays along a trajectory. (380)

As Deleuze and Guattari describe the nomad in opposition to the migrant (or the rhizome in opposition to the tree), so Carter describes the explorer in opposition to the empiricist – the discoverer, the scientist, the surveyor. For the explorer, the practices of travelling and the spaces traversed *between* points (the intermezzo) are just as important as the end points of the journey, as 'travelling itself was knowledge and not merely the fruits of travel' (25). For the empiricist, the journey is important only as a means of reaching a specific and predetermined end.

Carter thus draws a sharp distinction between the practices of exploration and discovery:

While discovery rests on the assumption of a world of facts waiting to be found, collected and classified, a world in which the neutral observer is not implicated, exploration lays stress on the observer's active engagement with his environment: it recognizes phenomena as offspring of his intention to explore. Despite the tendency of most historians to regard the terms as virtually interchangeable, the pleasures of discovery and exploration rest on utterly opposed theoretical assumptions. (25)

In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, then, practices of discovery can be seen as practices of tracing, of reproducing 'the image of the world' through the collection and classification of facts. Exploration, on the other hand, involves the creation of a rhizome between the explorer and the world: 'To be an explorer was to inhabit a world of potential objects with which one carried on an imaginary dialogue' (25). Or,

as Marcus might put it, exploration is a conversation between the explorer and the world brought about by the former's 'intention to explore'.

The distinction Carter makes between the (nomadic) explorer and the (sedentary) discoverer is not limited to the realm of geography, as the arborescent model of collection and classification also typifies the scientific 'discovery' of Australian flora. In describing the differences between Captain James Cook and Sir Joseph Banks, Carter notes that 'where Banks was preoccupied with the typical, Cook was concerned with the singular; where Banks tended to generalize, Cook tended to specify' (18). Cook the explorer literally makes maps, and also does so in the rhizomatic sense of the term: the placenames he gives to various geographical features can be read as traces of a continuing dialogue between Cook and the eastern coast of the continent.

On the other hand, Banks, the scientist, constructs Linnaean trees (Class–Order–Genus–Species) to describe the indigenous plant life of the Australian continent. In language that might just as easily have been Deleuze and Guattari's, Carter describes the Linnaean system as 'a taxonomy characterized by tree-like ramifications' (20), and goes on to note that:

one of the temptations of the Linnaean system is to pass from species to classes, from particular differences to abstract uniformities. . . . Rather than encourage closer examination, it circumvents it. It denies the possible otherness that would render the unknown worth knowing. It renders the potentially interesting fact null and void. (21)

The problem with the Linnaean system is not that it is too abstract, but that it is 'not abstract enough'. While it allows for the *multiple* (there is always room for new discoveries: just add another branch to the tree), it denies the possibility of *multiplicities*, as the system is ultimately and inevitably a closed one:

By a curious irony, even though [Banks] sets out to botanize on the supposition his botanical knowledge is incomplete, his knowledge is always complete: each object, found, translated into a scientific fact and detached from its historical and geographical surroundings, becomes a complete world in itself. It loses all power to signify beyond itself, to suggest lines of development or the subtler influences of climate, ground and aspect. (22)

Describing a later phase in the European colonization of the Australian continent, Carter contrasts the figure of the explorer with that of the surveyor. While the former is content to traverse a territory, the latter wishes to define – and thus possess – the terrain, to transform a space into a historical place: 'the survey did not

simply imitate physical space: it translated it into a symbolic object whose properties were as much historical as geographical' (101). The surveyor's task, Carter argues, is one of drawing boundaries where none existed before, a process of colonization involving what Deleuze and Guattari might describe as the striation of a smooth space:

There is a significant difference between the spaces: sedentary space is striated, by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures, while nomad space is smooth, marked only by 'traits' that are effaced and displaced within the trajectory. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 381)

The lines of travel in sedentary culture restrict movement and close spaces off from one another, while nomadic trajectories are enabling and empowering in their ability to open up space and promote movement. Carter's discussion of the 'surveying before settling' policies of Anglo-Australian colonization shows this process of striating a previously smooth space:

Only by dividing the land into equal parts could the government prevent the first comers from picking out the 'eyes of the country', to the disadvantage of later settlers. The survey equalized the country. (226)

This 'equalization' of the terrain was not limited to the surveying of the outback, as the process of plotting out future cities and towns along rectilinear grids also helped to striate the soon-to-be-urban spaces of the continent:

The elements of the grid were means of translating the country into a place for reliable travelling. Rendering the topographical peculiarities of the country 'level', at least in theory, they rendered travelling itself an activity independent of place. Ultimately, the effect of this geometrical tendency was to iron out spatial differences, to nullify the strangeness of here and there. (221)

Carter's notion of surveying as a means 'of rendering the country habitable' (108) parallels Deleuze and Guattari's argument concerning the state's role in organizing the space under its jurisdiction:

One of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire 'exterior', over all of the flows traversing the ecumenon. (385)

'The survey,' Carter argues, 'with its triple artillery of map, sketches and journal, was a strategy for translating space into a conceivable object' (113). The Europeans who colonized the continent did not find a ready-made Australia simply awaiting their arrival; rather

they striated a previously smooth space and constructed a country, not just with axes and hammers, but with surveys, maps and (most importantly for Carter) language. Australia could not come into being (much less be settled) until the 'wish to see chaos yield to order' (xiv) had been fulfilled. As Carter puts it: 'It was not by discovering novelties but by ordering them, rendering them conceptually and culturally visible, that the great work of colonization went ahead' (128).

The Road to Botany Bay, then, is not so much a rewriting of the history of colonial Australia as it is a tale about the act of writing that history:

I'm interested in how writing itself is the medium of history. Writing isn't something that simply comments on events that occurred elsewhere. What we have – the original documents, maps, journals – are themselves sorts of writing, and I am interested in the relationship between the act of writing history and the original historical writings on which that process is based.⁹

Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that writing 'has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come' (5) succinctly sums up Carter's central thesis. The writings Carter describes – the journals, maps and surveys of the Europeans who settled the continent – literally bring the realm of Australia into existence and produce a space in which history can then occur.

Carter's book forms a rhizome with the imperial histories that have come before it: its conversation with the primary and secondary sources of Anglo-Australian history reveals the seldom recognized fact that these documents are not objective representations of 'the way it was', but are themselves dialogues between their authors and the world they lived in. Thus, in an effort to avoid the totalizing traps endemic to imperial history, Carter's spatial history rejects traditional assumptions of academic objectivity:

A spatial history does not go confidently forward. It does not organize its subject matter into a nationalist enterprise. It advances exploratively, even metaphorically, recognizing that the future is invented. Going back, it questions the assumption that the past has been settled once and for all. (294)

Marcus also has doubts about the settlement of the past, describing it as 'an unsettled debt of history' that extends into an 'unresolved past' (184). But the characters Marcus describes are not concerned with the invention of the future; rather they are screaming that there is 'NO FUTURE!' Which makes Marcus's tale another story altogether . . .

Trace

You can never get rid of ants because they form an animal rhizome that can rebound time and again after most of it has been destroyed.

A Thousand Plateaus, 9

In terms of subject matter, *Lipstick Traces* is half a world and several centuries (in both directions) removed from *The Road to Botany Bay*. Carter's Anglo-Australian settlers seem to have little in common with Marcus's parade of raving heretics and prophets. The dissimilarities between the two books, however, are not as great as they appear to be on the surface, as both authors engage in radical critiques of the more traditional methods of writing history, and Marcus's 'secret history' bears a strong resemblance to the 'spatial history' described by Carter. But where Carter is concerned with how the writing of history erases vital details of 'important' historical moments, Marcus is more interested in the question of what constitutes an 'important' historical moment in the first place, and how certain events which were at least momentarily significant are nevertheless relegated to mere footnotes in history – if they even receive that much attention. Marcus's book is thus primarily concerned with revolutionary movements that came and went, neither changing the world nor leaving behind lasting evidence of their brief moments of success; all they left to posterity is the equivalent of 'lipstick traces on a cigarette'.

For example, in describing the 1964 Free Speech Movement at Berkeley (in which he participated), Marcus implies that traditional standards of what constitutes acceptable historical evidence are insufficient to the task of explaining the significance of historical events:

Though the Free Speech Movement would occasionally be cited in years to come as a harbinger of the storm of protest that swept the campuses of the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, . . . in fact the event, its spirit, in which people acted not for others but for themselves, with no sense of distance or separation, completely disappeared, as if it had never been. . . . Even though the event left nothing behind one could touch – no monuments, not even a plaque – I never got over it. (445)

Once again we hear echoes of Deleuze and Guattari, as Marcus argues, not that conventional notions of history are too abstract, but that they are not abstract enough:

What is history anyway? Is history simply a matter of events that leave behind those things that can be weighed and measured – new institutions, new maps, new rulers, new winners and losers – or is it also the result of moments that seem to leave nothing behind, nothing but the

mystery of spectral connections between people long separated by place and time, but somehow speaking the same language? (4)

With these questions always just beneath the surface of his writing, Marcus maps out 'a secret history of a time that passed', a conversation between nearly a dozen different movements, spanning over seven centuries of European history, most of which were oblivious to their 'predecessors', but all of which nevertheless spoke 'the same language'.

Lipstick Traces doesn't provide us with a genealogical tracing of these movements, and Marcus's goal is not to show that 'real' connections somehow existed between groups and individuals who had no direct knowledge of their cultural forerunners. There is, Marcus argues, no unbroken chain of ancestors and descendants to be (re)constructed:

The question of ancestry in culture is spurious. Every new manifestation in culture rewrites the past, changes old maudits into new heroes, old heroes into those who should have never been born. . . . Looking at the connections others had made and taken for granted (check a fact, it wasn't there), I found myself caught up in something that was less a matter of cultural genealogy, of tracing a line between pieces of a found story, than of making the story up. (21–2)

In fact, the power of the story that Marcus 'makes up' lies precisely in the gaps that exist between the movements he describes. 'A rhizome', Deleuze and Guattari tell us, 'may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines' (9). So it is with Marcus's conversation: the tale told by John of Leyden (for instance) comes to an abrupt end with his execution in 1535, but it is picked up again unknowingly by the Paris Commune of 1871, the Dadaists of Zürich and Berlin in the 1910s, the Lettrists of the 1950s, the Situationists of the 1960s, and the London punks of the mid-1970s.

The connection between punk and dada (to pick up the thread that sends Marcus off on his hunt for the source of punk's 'fecundity as culture') is *not* one of ancestry; genealogy does not even necessarily serve as a useful means of establishing connections between different movements and moments:

Lost children seek their fathers and fathers seek their lost children, but nobody really looks like anybody else. So all, fixed on the wrong faces, pass each other by: this is the drift of secret history, a history that remains secret even to those who make it, especially to those who make it. (184–5)

For Marcus, then, punk marks a moment in which an 'unsettled

debt of history' left over from dada (among others) is brought back into play.

Marcus is by no means the first critic to link punk with dada. By the time *Lipstick Traces* was published, the notion of punk as dada had long become a cliché of both rock critics and art historians. But as Marcus points out, the connection made between the two movements is usually little more than another of 'the history-in-nutshell parallels always needed to explain something new, or explain it away' (199):

No one tried to use dada to find the limits of punk, or vice versa: to start a conversation between the past and the present, to wonder just how it is that an idea jumps a sixty-year gap, or burrows under it. Instead there was a setup. The dada aesthetic went into the books as 'anti-art'; punk was 'anti-rock.' (200)

This act of classification does not explain punk, but removes the need to explain it by confining it within a known category. Punk merely becomes another twig on a branch of the tree of art history . . . unless it becomes the analogous dada-like branch on the tree of rock history. Either way, such tracings of punk's roots only serve to explain it away. As Marcus points out, 'the entanglement of now and then is fundamentally a mystery' (23), and most critics who draw connections between punk and dada are interested in simplifying, rather than understanding, that mystery. Not only do they reduce punk to dada, but dada itself is reduced to the particular portion of dada that eventually gave rise to surrealism, which is 'what the historians really [want] to talk about' (200). For Marcus, however, punk does not evolve from dada; rather there is (in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology) an aparallel evolution of the two. Marcus does more than simply trace the outlines of dada onto punk: he plugs these tracings back into his map of seven centuries of avant-garde movements.

The aparallel evolutions central to Marcus's story, then, apply not only to punk and dada, but to most of the other movements he describes as well.¹⁰ Just as 'the dadaists played out the reggae aphorism that there are no truths, only versions' (205), *Lipstick Traces* itself refuses claims of truth, offering instead a version of Marcus's story for every revolutionary movement he describes. As if in direct response to Deleuze and Guattari's demand, 'Don't be one or multiple, be multiplicities!', Marcus tells not just one story, or even several different stories, but several different versions of 'the same' story.

Marcus's explicit refusal of traditional standards of historical

'truth' and 'accuracy' has not prevented critics from applying such criteria to his book anyway. For instance, Andrew Ross claims that 'because of its bad faith with history, *Lipstick Traces* has no alternative . . . but to present a history that can only be taken on faith'.¹¹ From here, Ross goes on in great detail to describe a series of questions that Marcus's story, in its 'bad faith with history', cannot answer. Ross's questions may be interesting, important even, but they all seek totalizing explanations for the movements Marcus describes. In doing so, Ross misses Marcus's point entirely. Where Ross is looking for cause-and-effect-like roots ('Is it true?'), Marcus is merely parading before us a series of surprisingly similar movements ('Does it work?'). *Lipstick Traces*, by Marcus's own admission, 'does not pretend to be a history of any of the movements it addresses' (449), not in the conventional sense of the word 'history'. Yet it is precisely the standards of conventional history that Ross invokes in passing judgement on the book. It is thus not surprising that Ross views Marcus's book as an 'apocalyptic' one:

Lipstick Traces must be seen in this light, as a 'situation without a future' for scholarship, a situation constructed on the ruins of scholarship, especially the scholarship responsible for the respective histories of avant-garde and popular culture which are familiar to us. (114)

Ross's interpretation of Marcus's writing seems to inject more apocalyptic rhetoric into the work than Marcus himself would argue for. Though Marcus is unashamedly critical of historical scholarship that, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, draws tracings instead of maps, and though he is self-admittedly 'making up' a story, it seems far-fetched to claim (as Ross does) that Marcus has somehow declared that 'scholarship is dead', especially given the extensive scholarly work Marcus undertook to unearth the fragments from which he constructed his tale.¹²

If anything, Marcus uses the tools of historical research as a weapon against traditional methods of writing history. And this links Marcus, not only to Carter (who uses the documents of imperial history to dismantle the accounts that history constructs), and not only to Deleuze and Guattari ('We employ a dualism of models only in order to arrive at a process that challenges all models'), but to the Sex Pistols as well:

They damned rock 'n' roll as a rotting corpse: a monster of moneyed reaction, a mechanism for false consciousness, a system of self-exploitation, a theater of glamorized oppression, a bore. Rock 'n' roll, Johnny Rotten would say, was only the first of many things the Sex Pistols came to destroy. And yet because the Sex Pistols had no other weapons, because they were fans in spite of themselves, they played rock 'n' roll,

stripping it down to essentials of speed, noise, fury, and manic glee no one had touched before. They used rock 'n' roll as a weapon against itself. (56-7)

If Marcus is, in fact, echoing the Sex Pistols and arguing that there is 'no future' for scholarship, it would be a mistake – if for no other reason, then because of Marcus's own scholarly efforts – to assume that his is an apocalyptic vision. Marcus, like Carter, and like Deleuze and Guattari, may very well be arguing that the dominant mode of scholarship needs to be rethought, if not deposed, but this is not the apocalypse. A call to revolution, perhaps, but not the apocalypse . . .

Record

Real mysteries cannot be solved, but they can be turned into better mysteries.

Lipstick Traces, 24

I want to close not by drawing any overarching conclusions (given the premise that the question 'Does it work?' supersedes that of 'Is it true?', a neatly packaged summary would be counterproductive), but by raising additional questions suggested by the quotes with which this essay started. Admittedly, to finish where I began is to flirt with producing a tracing ('which always comes back "to the same"'¹³), but, as Carter points out,

going and coming back are by no means the same thing. The mileage may be the same and, to judge from the map, the route identical. But, to the traveller on the road, the difference is obvious. (172)

Neither the traveller nor the starting point is exactly the same upon returning as they were upon departing, and so the sense of closure that characterizes a tracing is never entirely complete.

Those who fail to appreciate *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi claims, 'would have been better off buying a record' (xv). Similarly, Jon Erickson cannot take *Lipstick Traces* seriously as a 'penetrating and coherent' book, but he can close the cover and listen to the Sex Pistols 'with new ears, and a bit of revived passion' (136). Even if we accept (and it seems fairly easy to do so) that the practices associated with reading printed texts and listening to music differ in significant ways, the question still remains: why do Massumi and Erickson feel compelled to set these two categories in binary opposition to one another? Reading and listening, after all, are not mutually exclusive activities, as the two can be (and often are) pursued simultaneously. Furthermore, the book and the record¹⁴ are not usually called upon to perform similar tasks, so the prospective

reader/listener is seldom forced to choose between the two media. It remains unclear why the book and the record need to be set in opposition to each other at all.

And, even if we grant (for the sake of argument) that the oppositional dichotomy between the book and the record is a valid one, why is listening to music presented as such a poor substitute for reading a book? Why, for instance, does Marcus's 'spirit and passion' succeed in giving Erickson 'new ears' with which to listen to the Sex Pistols, but fail to redeem the book from Erickson's disapproving judgement – especially given Erickson's claim that the book's visceral impact 'raises more questions than either theory or historicism can answer in their indifferent ways' (136)? And by what double standard is it reasonable for Ross to complain that *Lipstick Traces* fails to answer enough questions, while he casts scornful aspersions on the notion that any record could possibly contain 'all of the raving voices of free spirits that Marcus summons up, from medieval heretics and carnivalesque Communards, to stammering dadaists and apocalyptic lettrists' (112)?

In opposition to this hierarchy – which privileges reading over listening, books over records, and (seemingly) the mind over the body – I would like to add one last voice to the conversation, that of Jacques Attali:¹⁵

Music . . . obliges us to invent categories and new dynamics to regenerate social theory, which today has become crystallized, entrapped, moribund. . . . Music is more than an object of study: it is a way of perceiving the world. A tool of understanding. Today, no theorizing accomplished through language or mathematics can suffice any longer; it is incapable of accounting for what is essential in time – the qualitative and the fluid, threats and violence. . . . My intention here is thus not only to theorize *about* music, but to theorize *through* music. (4)

Significantly, Attali does not simply invert the reading-over-listening hierarchy to privilege the record over the book. He does not claim that 'theorizing accomplished through language' is no longer *necessary*, merely that it is no longer *enough*. Furthermore, his argument that 'social theory . . . has become crystallized, entrapped, moribund' is one that Deleuze and Guattari, Carter and Marcus all make in their own different ways. Whether or not 'theorizing through music' is a useful way out of that trap is a question that I cannot pretend to answer adequately here and now. But if Attali is right (which is not to say that his statement is true, but that it works), then so, oddly enough, is Massumi, as in such a scenario we would all be better off buying records . . .

NOTES

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¹ J. Erickson, Review of *Lipstick Traces*, *Discourse*, 12, 1, 1989–90, pp. 129–36.

² B. Massumi, Translator's Foreword: 'Pleasures of Philosophy', in G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987 edn), pp. ix–xv.

³ G. Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

⁴ P. Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987).

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 15.

⁶ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, tr. D. Polan (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1975), p. 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹ P. Carter and D. Malouf, 'Spatial History', *Textual Practice*, 3, 2, 1989, pp. 173–83.

¹⁰ Though direct ancestral links can be drawn between the Lettrists, Situationists and the May 1968 Paris revolt, these are the exceptions rather than the rule, and Marcus goes to great pains to plug these genealogical tracings back into the rhizomatic map he constructs.

¹¹ A. Ross, 'The Rock 'n' Roll Ghost', *October*, 50, 1989, p. 113.

¹² *Lipstick Traces*, p. 19: 'my attempt to make something of [these connections] led me from the card catalogue at the university library in Berkeley to the dada founding site in Zürich, from Gil J Wolman's bohemian flat in Paris to Michèle Bernstein's seventeenth-century parsonage in Salisbury, England, from Alexander Trocchi's junkie pad in London back to books that had stood on library shelves for thirty years before I checked them out'.

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 12.

¹⁴ In this post-vinyl age, the term 'record' is something of an anachronism, but to the best of my knowledge no other term has yet been coined that adequately describes the trinity of compact disks, cassettes and records. The term should be read here, not as an exclusive reference to vinyl versions of music software, but as a token for the entire range of formats for recorded music.

¹⁵ I leave it as an exercise for the truly adventurous reader to make up an appropriately surprising story based upon the serendipitous fact that Brian Massumi also translated J. Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987).

OPERA AND POWER

JIM DAVIDSON

In the film *Romper Stomper*, a characteristic move is made by the director. When the gang moves in on a house in Toorak, strains of opera are heard as they creep down a passage to the main rooms. At once this signals privilege and pretension, a whiff of the unnatural, later sustained by a revelation of past incest. The music used is that old warhorse 'In the Depths of the Temple' – which also appears in *Gallipoli* to suggest friendship of an endangering intensity. In both cases this is a long way from Bizet's intention of having the voices of two friends joining together, enraptured by the same woman; but opera is felt by many people to be inseparable from social and political power, an art form exclusive and excluding. Although this viewpoint has been weakened considerably by the advent of televised and stadium opera, they have a case. There has indeed often been an alliance between opera and power, whether centralized authority, the upper bourgeoisie, or imperialism. Even so, the traditional opera house has often given rise to a greater element of contestation than commonly thought, while nowadays the power of opera itself is being manifested in a number of strikingly different ways.

The first point to be made is that the art form which first appeared in princely Italian courts at the turn of the seventeenth century contained ingredients which would enable it to sweep the world. By the 1650s it was soundly established in commercial theatres in Venice, with the prima donna well to the fore; not long after, inquiries were being made from Constantinople about the possibility of an Italian company touring there. In recent years there has been a Chinese *Carmen*, both televised and recorded, while the Albanian state has employed a stable of librettists full-time – the only known instance where this has been done. Bulgaria runs to an astonishing ten opera houses, more than one for each million of the population. But it is not merely communist and former communist countries that have taken opera to their bosom. In Turkey local operas were being written and performed by the 1930s, as they were in Egypt, where for the Mozart bicentenary in 1991 two