§ IMMANENT MATERIALISMS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

A Thousand Plateaus (1988) is an integrated philosophical system. One might say that the plateaus have no start and no end, though one is able to reconstruct their evolution through understanding the influences and intentions of the authors. Deleuze borrows terms and concepts from the history of philosophy. Guattari worked through psychoanalytic and political conceptions of the Real. The first point about the plateaus is that they mean to say something important about the unconscious. Deleuze and Guattari worked out a means to link economics with the unconscious in their first joint book, Anti-Oedipus (1984). This was essentially achieved by closely meshing Freud with Marx, and by taking the most non-normative approach possible to this alignment. Anti-Oedipus is a breakthrough text in terms of understanding how the unconscious works on a
social and economic plane, and because it unties the stranglehold of Oedipus on the unconscious. *A Thousand Plateaus* goes further than *Anti-Oedipus* in that the unconscious is set free from the universal, historically dialectical time of Marx and given specific dates and foci. The focus of this writing is [traffic jams—2011]; and this determines a plateau that continually interacts with the unconscious and everyday life.

Immanent materialism is here an example of a new materialism (Coole and Frost 2010). This means that the ways in which one understands materialism is in a state of constant re-evaluation. Thoughts, the imagination, and the unconscious are included in this immanent materialist analysis, as the restructuring of materialist flows is in a state of perpetual flux. One could cogently ask about the nature of the real, given the mixture of thoughts and actual life that immanent materialism somewhat perilously demarcates (see Brassier 2011). Deleuze (1995) answered this question in terms of the careful synthesis and analysis of everyday life. One isn’t interested in everything to do with everyday life, but in the intersections and dynamics of everyday life that emerge in the gaps between the packages of thought and the flows of material objects that one can follow. There is a form of chaos theory at work here, yet this theory is mitigated by and blended with philosophy. The precise material model of
everyday life that one derives according to immanent materialism must say something about agency and politics. Everyday life flows through us, yet it is also out there in the world as a combinational matrix that subjugates and divides. Everyday life started long before we were born and will continue after we are dead, yet “everyday life” also has a particular reality that we may describe today in terms of the Real. This letter does work in this arena by locating traffic jams and the petro-citizen as a contemporary plateau for 2011 and putting them into conceptual and theoretical action.

The immanent materialism of this writing responds to a vitalist concept of time. This means that the dynamic interactions of everyday life that are formed in the unconscious are extended through time as a vital energy in “things” (see Bennett 2010). One could say that the ways in which traffic jams affect us determines a form of duration or durée, which is an accumulating mode of understanding time. The accumulating mode of time adds to the sense of time as repetition, absurdity, boredom and sameness. Not only does the powerlessness of traffic jams capture one’s unconscious, it also stretches and plays with time. The endless repetition of the experience of traffic jams in one’s life requires a strict vitalism, which animates the ways in which the contemplation and representation of traffic jams may alter reality. This alteration links the
immanent materialism of this letter to art, and shows how traffic jams can be taken out of context and given new and different life. This connection to artwork also corresponds to the Spinozism (see, for example, Gatens 1996) that is functioning here, in that representations of traffic jams uncover affect in both the viewer and doer of the art. For example, in Goddard’s film, *Weekend*, the positioning of the narration and viewing is deliberately complicated to increase the impact of the traffic jams and car crashes. The affect of traffic jams is a dynamic collision of forces that can set off random and unforeseen events, as well as perpetual “stuckness.” Traffic jams can be dramatic, moving, unearthly, and awe-inspiring. In this sense, the traffic jam determines a mode of social production without ownership that one may take from Marx, and a plane of immanence that attempts to establish differences in kind. These differences in kind are importantly distinguished from Kantian differences, in that the difference that immanent materialism establishes is not involved with transcendence or the subject “I” (Kant 1933). Phenomenology is circumvented through immanent materialism by setting the subject free of its perceptual bindings. The main strategy that Deleuze & Guattari (1988) use to free one of perceptual binding is the insertion of the multiple into argumentation. For example, the traffic jam could be seen as one homogeneous nightmare,
or taken apart through close inspection of its component parts. However, at the heart of this unbinding action, and in order to cope with the dictates of the Real in an expanded and convoluted subject, lies an inevitable confrontation with death. In between the spaces of the traffic jam, both in our minds and in reality — are car crashes. The insertion of car crashes into the immanent materialism of traffic jams brings us closer to the reality of everyday life.