

Book Review

What Lies Beyond: A Review of Aaron Schuster's *The Trouble With Pleasure: Deleuze and Psychoanalysis*

Reviewed by Clayton Crockett

I cannot decide whether to praise this book or complain about it. My main objection is that it is just too good, too smart, too well-written, and I wish that I could have written it myself but I know that I could never have done so. Here I echo Schuster's suggestion about the difficulty that psychoanalysts have engaging with Deleuze when he says that, "Maybe this is what makes it hard for a Lacanian to read Deleuze: it's just too good" (29). It's hard to read Schuster's book; *it's just too good*. Despite this complaint, the value of *The Trouble With Pleasure* is how Schuster finds a way to read Deleuze and Lacan together, in complementary rather than antagonistic terms. Both Lacan and Deleuze follow Freud in opening up a perspective beyond pleasure, beyond the simple operation of anything that we could call a pleasure principle.

Oh sure, Schuster could have taken the easy way out. He could have restricted his focus solely to the Deleuze of the late 1960s, to *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, before Deleuze's (and Deleuze and Guattari's) break with psychoanalysis. In the late 1960s, there was a good deal of appreciation and praise for each other's work by Lacan and Deleuze. But by the early 1970s, there was a tremendous amount of complaining on both sides. And poor Félix Guattari was caught in the middle. A practicing psychoanalyst, Guattari was supposed to be Lacan's heir and successor, before he was kicked to the curb to make room for Lacan's son-in-law, Jacques-Alain Miller. Then he was

“rescued” by Deleuze, and contributed tremendously to their ground-breaking two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, as well as two other books with Deleuze, but most philosophical readers and commenters denigrate and dismiss Guattari’s theoretical significance.

What Schuster shows, however, is that despite the jealousy and mutual hostility, there remains a good deal in common to the respective projects of Deleuze (and Deleuze and Guattari) and Lacan in the 1970s. And the crucial thread that links their work is a suspicion of pleasure and a willingness to think beyond it. In his Preface, which is a substantial treatise in itself, Schuster undertakes a “Critique of Pure Complaint.” This is a brilliant reading, beginning with the nature of the joke, in which he draws attention to “the pleasure of complaining itself” (3). Complaining is a complicated and significant process that applies to both psychoanalysis and to philosophy. For Lacan, Schuster offers a paraphrase of Freud: “where the complaint was, there I shall be” (10). Here the unconscious is the source of complaint that the analyst follows in psychoanalysis. For Deleuze, complaining “has a real expressive power” when it rises to the nature of a great complaint. The Deleuzian formula of complaint is “*what is happening is too much for me*” (16). Complaining is the essence of desire.

In his Introduction, “Clinical Prospects for a Future Philosophy,” Schuster clarifies what is at stake in the book. He says, “The starting point of this book is that Deleuze posed a profound and far-reaching philosophical challenge to psychoanalysis that is all the more challenging in that it is difficult to know exactly how to place it” (29). The genius of *The Trouble With Pleasure* is Schuster’s ability to articulate and situate this challenge. “If anything,” he writes, “Lacanian psychoanalysis and Deleuzian philosophy are unbearably close, and the real problem is: what generates the gap between their two positions?” (30). One way to name this gap is to see Deleuze’s work as a radical extension of the concept of life, whereas Lacan’s work is a correspondingly radical extension of death.

In the body of his book, Schuster develops psychoanalytic readings of three Deleuzian texts: *Difference and Repetition*, *Logic of Sense*, and *Anti-Oedipus*. The first two are not new or ground-breaking; what makes them so important here is how they set up and enable Schuster’s incredible interpretation of *Anti-Oedipus* as “an attempt at founding a new clinical anthropology on the basis of a metaphysics of desire” (45). In many ways, Lacan continues to emphasize the importance of the symbolic, and the functioning of the signifier for human meaning, even as he becomes more and more pessimistic about its ethical significance. Deleuze, however, downplays the importance of the symbolic in favor of the imaginary and the real, although it never entirely disappears. Schuster claims that in the wake of the *Logic of Sense*,

If the Deleuzian universe is teeming with sense, for Lacan subjectivity is formed through a confrontation with the impasse of the symbolic order and, in a Pascalian way, with the meaninglessness and unmoved silence of the Other. This is why, despite his appropriation of the concept of symbolic castration, from a Lacanian standpoint the cut between signifier and signified is never really effectuated in Deleuze's logic of sense, and in *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze will, while maintaining the idea of the autonomy of the recording surface and its quasi-cause, accordingly forgo the concept of castration. In its place will come a new and expanded theory of the body without organs (96).

In his final chapter, Schuster reads *Anti-Oedipus* as Deleuze's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and claims that in this important work the concept of schizophrenia is "not merely a metaphor for fragmentation, dissolution, and generalized boundary-breaking, but...a serious attempt at founding a new clinical anthropology" (155). For Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenic psychosis is not a deficient form of psychic life, a refusal to accept one's integration into the symbolic order, but a process and a voyage towards an alternative mode of experience (157). According to Schuster, despite the polemics against Freud, Lacan, and the Oedipus complex, *Anti-Oedipus* constitutes an immanent critique of psychoanalysis. "Their goal is not to tear down psychoanalysis," he points out, "but to recover its properly subversive core" before it gets domesticated by means of the normalizing Oedipus complex (161).

Ultimately what characterizes the uniqueness of *Anti-Oedipus* is the expansion of the concept of the body without organs, which stretches to incorporate the entire clinic of psychoanalytic practice in a way that twists Lacanian orthodoxy but preserves its most powerful insights. Schuster describes three syntheses of the unconscious, to go along with the three syntheses of time that Deleuze develops in *Difference and Repetition*. The first synthesis is a connective synthesis that "involves the proliferation of partial objects and their multiple connections, and how their frenzy is countered by the body with organs" of the organism. The next synthesis is a disjunction one, where "the body without organs appropriates the partial objects as its own, recording their connections on its smooth surface."

The liberation of partial objects from their proper role in the body of the organism frees them for further connections and possibilities in a sphere of psychic production. This is the third synthesis, a "synthesis of *consumption* and *consummation*, [in which] the body is submitted to a further development, becoming a field of intensities" (167). Deleuze and Guattari want to see how the partial objects (imaginary) and the body without organs (real) can be freed from the tyranny of the organism (symbolic). Their experimental project involves

opposing and downgrading the importance of the symbolic order along with its implication of a proper body, and body with organs that know their place, their purpose and their function. To directly link the partial objects, which Lacan calls *objets petit a*, with the body without organs, is to compose a clinic for radical innovation of concepts and objects, along with the new kinds of sense that they bring about. This is a liberation of pure pleasure as desire (or what Lacan calls *jouissance*) beyond the confines of any principle.

Deleuze and Lacan represent two complementary ways to venture into the strange realm “beyond” the pleasure principle. We are tempted to read them in oppositional terms, but Schuster demonstrates that that is not the best way to understand them. We could apply Žižek’s term parallax to our understanding of how their work is interrelated, although Schuster does not use this word in his book. What Lacan and Deleuze share is thus “the occurrence of an insurmountable *parallax gap*, the confrontation of the closely linked perspectives between which no neutral ground is possible.”¹ Of course, Schuster does not present Deleuze and Lacan in equal terms; he provides a psychoanalytic reading of Deleuze, rather than a Deleuzian interpretation of Lacan’s texts. Furthermore, despite the brilliance of his reading of *Anti-Oedipus*, Schuster does not engage with *A Thousand Plateaus*, or with Deleuze’s philosophy after *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, including *The Fold* and the two volumes on *Cinema*. These are minor complaints, and even a little cheap, but they allow us to recognize and affirm that there are limits to Schuster’s treatment as well as more ground to be covered in our thinking and understanding of Lacan and Deleuze. At least he leaves us some room to complain *just a little*.

Both French thinkers offer parallax views on how to think beyond the pleasure principle. The death drive is not somewhere else besides the pleasure principle, and Eros and Thanatos do not constitute a Manichean dualism. Pain is not the opposite of pleasure, but in important ways to it, just as masochism is not the opposite of sadism. For Freud, Lacan, and Deleuze, masochism is the primary term and phenomenon. The key is that masochism is itself creative, giving rise to new ideas, new concepts, and new practices. Sadism, as pleasurable as it is, is sterile, because however cleverly it is employed, it can only produce variations on the same scenario. Death drive is one name for the beyond of the pleasure principle, and masochism is another. For Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenia is another name for this beyond. It is schizophrenia in these specific terms that “is truly creative, or at least contains ‘the potential for revolution,’ because it is closest to the intensive real” (177). This beyond of the pleasure principle is always already at work within our ordinary bourgeois pleasure, *troubling* pleasure. And that is a *good* thing, and we should be grateful for Schuster’s brilliant book, even if we still want the chance to complain about it.

- 1 Slavoj Zizek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 4
(emphasis in original).