

Deleuze Compendium

Kathleen Vandeputte

Essay – November 1, 2009

Ed Romein, Marc Schuilenburg en Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.), *Deleuze Compendium*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2009, ISBN 9789085065388, 408 pp.

Although the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze has long been influential, not only in philosophical, but also in academic, artistic and political circles, a thorough survey of his work has been lacking in Dutch-speaking regions. This need has in any case been met with the publication of the *Deleuze Compendium*. As Deleuze's appealing, dandyish gaze on the cover leads us to suspect, his idiosyncratic philosophy leaves few unmoved. An understanding of his thinking, however, is not so self-evident and pretty much goes hand in hand with a solid and difficult read. A guidebook aimed at putting his philosophy into perspective would therefore certainly be no luxury.

The compendium takes us through an effervescent Deleuzian landscape of differential virtuality, rhizomatic planes of immanence and nomadic streams of desire. It is a philosophy for travelling in, with expert guides like Isabelle Stengers, Henk Oosterling and Rudi Laermans, to mention a few. Yet whoever thinks that they can get away with an easy-going, all-in trip will be misled. In Deleuze's work we come up against a recalcitrant philosophy that leaves many a reader perplexed. His writings are riddled with concepts such as rhizomatic, endo-consistency, noology, chaosmos and – to mention one more – indi-drama-different/ciation. Are not the most interesting philosophers those who invent and reconfigure concepts because their ravishing thought happens to run up against the limits of language? The importance of Deleuze reaches further than just an appreciation of postmodern eclecticism or fashionable 'geneologizing'; his thinking arises out of a current necessity and concrete problems in philosophy, since it reveals something of reality. This is crystallized in his side-swipe at the terror of self-satisfied thinking and his constant renewal of concepts in order to deploy them in his own philosophy. But this does not by any means imply an intellectual demolition through putting paid once and for all to the philosophical tradition. His early work, with monographs on Hume, Nietzsche, Bergson and Spinoza, which are dealt with in the first part of the compendium, bears witness to this. In the French climate around 1950, when the voices of Hegel, Heidegger and Husserl were reverberating the loudest, Deleuze's decision to interpret exactly these philosophers can at least be called daring and unconventional. This becomes clear in the essay by Romein, in which Hume is given a figurative transcendental-empirical interpretation, and in the piece by Peter de Graeve, where Deleuze's specific interpretation of Nietzsche leads to the development of the notion of 'conceptual personages'.

In the second part we are introduced to the shift towards a particular development of his body of ideas, with often complicated books such as *Le pli, Différence et répétition* and *Logique du sens*. In contrast to the melancholy that disillusioned Marxists seem to propagate, Deleuze brings a new dynamism to philosophy by making curiosity and original creation the driving force of thinking, but without falling into naive optimism or experimental pottering. Ger Groot confirms this dynamism in his piece about differentiation: 'Those who really think must dare to abandon the evidentiality, clarity and apparent irrefutability that offer the mind safety and security' (page 144).

The third part discusses his collaboration with Felix Guattari and their two-volume *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*. Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, the masters of mistrust, accompany them in their critique of the logic of identity and representation and of desire as a fundamental lack, although Deleuze and Guattari also think beyond May '68, as Laermans subtly demonstrates. Deleuze's excursions into other domains (mostly art, but also ontology, mathematics and physics), which is focussed on in the last part, point to the broad strength of Deleuze's ideas. In the words of Sarah Posman in her compelling piece about literature and the stuttering of language: 'It is a bastard perspective that sends your thinking in directions that you would not have thought possible' (page 299).

It would be un-Deleuzian not to get cracking oneself in a dissipative way with Deleuze's framework of concepts, just as a presentation of his philosophy as an absolute transparent system would not be in keeping with the nature and style of his thinking. Any attempt at this would just get bogged down in what Deleuze disputes: the reduction of philosophical thinking to a homogeneous, clichéd essence registered in the philosophical clarity. This means, in other words, that philosophy must be perpetrated and not simply studied in order to be followed. The compendium succeeds astonishingly well in providing pieces of the puzzle here and there, which even make you hungry in advance for further reading. The occasional repetitions that the book perforce contains are not disturbing in the least; rather, they rhizomize through the reading of the book, so that one becomes more strongly tied and compelled to an affective bond with differentiating, Deleuzian process thinking. One and the same theme is folded open from different perspectives as a 'regaining, permeated with difference and deviation, of the singular' (page 125). In particular, the introductory essay by the editors immediately manages in this way to be exciting, just as Oosterling's 'Rhizome', Schuilenburg's 'Assemblages' and Marcel Cobussen also further elaborate on the theme of the rhizomatic. This perspectivism is formally stressed because the essays do not presume an imperative sequence of reading meant to lead to a systematic accumulation of knowledge. Most of the essays challenge, although not always explicitly, the various critiques that weigh on Deleuze's work: from Badiou's reproach that behind the multiplicity there still lies hidden a melancholic Sehnsucht for the One (in, among others, the essay by Wiep van Bunge and Leen de Bolle) to the sceptical critique that the glorification of continual 'becoming' and 'creating' connects seamlessly with capitalist consumerism (dealt with in the essay, for example, by Patricia Pisters and Laermans). On the contrary, such a picture of Deleuze is alien to this book.

Deleuze's philosophizing, in which thinking is fundamentally connected with immanence, sets us firmly back with two feet on the ground after an interminable period dominated by a Platonic and Cartesian tradition. Here the influence of Spinoza and phenomenology is indisputable, as the lucid essays by Wiep van Bunge and Judith Wambacq respectively make clear. Transcendence and dualism are radically put paid to, while his rebelliousness and Nietzschean distrust of a hegemony of thinking stimulate creativity. Yet this unbridled creativity perhaps rather gets in the way of the accessibility and lucidity that this compendium speaks of. The density of Deleuze's work seems to repeat itself in a number of essays, so that the reader ends up feeling lost in the academic constructions ventured in Van Tuinen's *Le pli*, for example, or when Richard de Brabander, in his essay on Foucault, discusses the grafting of archaeology onto geology, and now and then in IIs

Huygens's essay 'Cinema'. Nevertheless, this compendium paves the way to Deleuze's work itself, since in its many-sidedness it manages to affect.

The fact that Deleuze ceaselessly questions the dominant doxa of the present, thereby indicating the symptoms of contemporary philosophical discourse, points to his difficult and non-contemporary thinking. That he also adulates openness and uncertainty in thinking makes him not only an indispensable philosopher but also – and perhaps more importantly – a thinker whom we want to 'read out of love'.¹

Kathleen Vandeputte has a degree in philosophy and has been a doctoral assistant at Ghent University, where she is working on her doctoral thesis, *Een politiek-filosofische analyse van differentie en sensus communis aestheticus*, since 2005. She has written articles about the *sensus communis*, Arendt, Lyotard, Rancière and Nancy.

Footnotes

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers* (Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1990), 16.

Tags

Philosophy

This text was downloaded on April 19, 2026 from
Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain
www.onlineopen.org/deleuze-compendium