What I want to do is try and make Deleuze and Guattari’s thought accessible, by simply explaining how it might relate to more familiar ideas.

Lacan and the Lack in Being

I’ll start by recapping Lacan, who we dealt with before the last break. To psychoanalysis, we are constituted as subjects according to early experience. In Freud, this was as a result of our relationship to that gender/power relationships in the nuclear family, as they were symbolized by the presence or absence of the penis, in other words, by the boy’s fear of a possible castration. Girls too try to deal with castration, but instead of clinging doggedly to some sense of penis-ownership, to masculine prerogatives of action, power and order, girls dream of a penis-substitute, a child.

As adults, according to Freud, we are prisoners of this early childhood experience. Our adult neuroses, obsessions, inclinations, tastes are all results of this structure instilled in us irrevocably in our early lives. We can be helped by therapy to manage this structure better, or to at least be better aware of it, but we cannot really change it.

Whatever we may think of this theory—and most peoples’ tendency is to ridicule it at first, which Freud saw as confirmation that it must be true, if we were all so desperate to deny it—we have to at least acknowledge that it is typical of our broad understanding of what a human individual is. In short, we all pretty much believe that, as an individual, “I” am something. I have a psychological nature or “personality” which is distinctly my own, and that is our sense of ourselves. It seems obvious to us.

Deleuze and Guattari are original because although their work is immersed in European (and non-European) philosophy, and in medical, scientific and psychoanalytic theory, they see themselves as undermining almost all of it. Their relationship to philosophy and theory is the same as the relationship of the Dadaists and Surrealists to Art, one of challenge, ridicule and subversion. This does not necessarily mean it comes from nowhere, because the tradition had been subject to radical disagreement many times, most notably in the modern era through the work of Marx, and for our purposes, Nietzsche and Freud. Deleuze had written a book on Nietzsche early in his career, and Nietzsche’s mocking attitude to European thinking is one Deleuze has taken up. Similarly, Guattari as a psychiatrist had been educated in Freudian theory, and together they have critiqued and revised psychoanalysis, and it is with this critique that I’ll start shortly.

Deleuze and Guattari are challenging because they attack many ideas that are fundamental to our common sense way of understanding the world. This is why it’s often very difficult to get our heads around their work, and probably at the end of this week’s sessions you’ll remain a bit baffled. By the same token, their work is very exciting and open to all kinds of possibilities. That’s why at a time in history like ours, when we’re obsessed with contriving new possibilities, and new ways of imagining and re-imagining ourselves, their work has become so popular amongst theorists.

Their work is important for our purposes because it straddles the two ways of thinking about subjectivity we have been dealing with the Freud/Lacan/psychoanalytic approach, and the Nietzsche/Foucault/power/knowledge approach. Like Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari believed that subjectivity in itself does not exist but is merely a fiction that is contrived at various times in history. In fact, they don’t even go this far. Instead, they believe it to be merely the collection, or intersection point, or “assemblage” as a word they often use, of a random set of impulses and vectors that they call “lines of flight”. On the other hand, they have produced their own version of psychoanalysis, a kind of parody of it if you like that they call “schizoanalysis”. In other words, they mock psychoanalysis, but on its own terms. Hopefully, today we’ll get some sense of their relationship to psychoanalysis, so that’s where I’ll start. My aim will not be to give an exhaustive account of their way of thinking, nor to explain the reading, which I hope you can work through in seminars, in conjunction with the textbook.
our imagination of other peoples’ opinions) that try to inhibit them. People do break these bonds, but at the price of severed relationships, disbelief, ridicule, and even violence (especially for some reason to do with gender/sexual norms).

To Deleuze and Guattari, it was Lacan’s version of this restrictive view of the self that they found most hard to swallow. Remember that Lacan saw our subjectivity as constructed when we connected with language. In the imaginary phase, we had that magical sense of oneness and fullness, that we soon realized to be an illusion. As a consequence, we spend the rest of our lives seeking some substitute for it. That search finds us wandering through the symbolic order, seeking something else, some image, feeling, word, object that will fill us up again. But we can never be filled up again. We can never find that magical sense of unity. It is left way behind us, at the very threshold of our subjectivity. There is a lack at the core of our selfhood that can never be filled up again. Lacan called this lack, the manque-à-être, the lack-of-being. So deep is this hole in ourselves, that it is a hole in being, not just in our personalities or our feelings.

Deleuze and Guattari utterly reject this view of selfhood as built around lack. They think this is laughably pessimistic, restrictive and negative. Human life should not be imagined in terms of limitations, impossibilities and restrictions. This denied the whole expansive, irrational, inventive, expansive side of human being.

Importantly, their rejection of this idea that we are built around lack also involves the rejection of a number of related ideas, primarily:

• That human subjectivity has a structure; and
• That it is interior.

I now want to look at these in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the Body without Organs, which is usually abbreviated as BwO.

**The Body without Organs (BwO).**

Traditionally, then, we think of the subject as having a more or less fixed nature, and that that nature is located inside us. Yet, many times during each day, we become completely different things. At the moment, as we are arranged in this theatre, we are not separate individuals whose behaviour is determined by our personal histories, our childhood anxiety about castration, our desire to fill up some deep hole within us. We are part of an arrangement of processes that include the operation of the university as an educational apparatus, the invisible trajectory of ideas and knowledge across historical time, the necessary processes of social patternings (of language, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class), each of which has its own energy, movement and drive; the unique culture established in this unit, the relationships we have amongst ourselves produced by the discussions/arguments/confusions we have shared together and so on. In other words, each of us is not giving expression to our hidden truth, as much as we are connected to each other within this room, and beyond this room to other material and also immaterial arrangements of practices, images, behaviours, forces and so on. This room is cross-crossed with all these possible lines of connection, and each of us brings to this room, and momentarily suppresses all sorts of other connections we have—as parts of complex domestic, social, secret, economic arrangements.

In each of these arrangements we are also connected to other physical processes, as parts of other complicated sets of practices and arrangements. Physically, we are part of the complex networks of weather, ecology, and physical proximity. We are the grounds for the complex life-cycle of millions of organisms that inhabit us, and that connect beyond us in infinite invisible arrangements. Socially, we are part of the reproductive cycles of the economy, of cultural norms, of ideas and images which traverse us, and that we reproduce, re-configure and re-energize constantly. Emotionally, we are caught up in imaginary networks of desire, love, loathing, and fantasy, that collect in fashion, entertainment, sporting, artistic and pornographic practices across societies and times, and so on and so forth.

And as we situate ourselves within these economic, emotional and physical networks, we become infinitely situated, infinitely related to an infinite number of possibilities that are constantly expanding, contorting, transforming and interconnecting.

As mentioned in the textbook, a simple example is the relationship between wasp and orchid. The life-cycles of the wasp and orchid are permanently entangled within one another: the orchid feeds the wasp; the wasp spreads the pollen of the orchid. Traditionally we would draw a line around the wasp, and one around the orchid and see them as separate beings that merely come into relationship with one another. But to Deleuze and Guattari, the wasp is part of the orchid and vice versa. The wasp is like the orchid’s genitalia; the orchid is the sustenance of the wasp. They do not become one another. They do not merge. They merely enter into a complex assemblage, a kind of wasp/orchid/reproduction/feeding machine, albeit only transitorily. This is what our situation is like in the myriad arrangements that situate us or that we pass through on any day, at any moment.

It’s important at this point to remember Nietzsche’s statement that we met earlier in the unit. Nietzsche rejected older understandings of subjectivity because they tried to see people in terms of what they are, rather than what they do. He wrote: “there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.” (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p.45). When we try to understand what is going on in the room, what is conditioning what is happening here amongst us, what is happening in all the arrangements in the world, in the relationship between the wasp and the orchid, what is important is not what things “are”, but what they are doing, what activities and processes they are part of. Events are unfolding, and we are included in their dynamic unfolding, as part of their operation. Any attempt to cut things off from one another and look at them in isolation falsifies what’s really happening in the world. This is what psychoanalysis does. It pretends that we should be understood outside of the contexts, or arrangements, in which we find ourselves. We never live outside of contexts, so why this makes any kind of sense is baffling and artificial to Deleuze and Guattari.
Rhizomatics

The reading is given over to the term rhizome, and its comparison with arborescence. I won't go into this in great detail, because it is spelt out in the textbook, but I just want to show briefly how the opposition between the anatomical body and the body without organs is repeated in the relationship between the arborescent and the rhizomatic.

Deleuze and Guattari talk a great deal about the contrast between the anatomical body and the BwO, and the contrats between the tree (or arborescent) and the rhizome. They are not interested in these things in themselves, as much as they want to use them as metaphors. They choose these things as metaphors, because they are already amongst the most common metaphors in Western discourse. We constantly describe things as having structures like a body, or like a tree. Almost all organizations are called bodies, with a head, and arms, at least, sometimes also with blood and heart. Many arrangements are compared to trees or parts of trees: roots, trunk and branches are constantly used as metaphors for things.

What do these metaphors assume? Basically they assume that all things are to be understood as unified, structured, interior and hierarchical. When we talk of a bank having a head office, and many branches, we merely combine these metaphors, jumbling them up, but the effect is the same. The organization is a single structured thing. Even though it may have many parts they are still all subordinated to a single over-riding structure. The branches are literally out on a limb: they are at the edges or limit of the structure and are less important than the head office.

As mentioned above, the purpose of Deleuze and Guattari’s work is to challenge this way of imagining things. They are not interested in seeing things in terms of the anatomical body; but the BwO: they want to envisage arrangements in terms of their outward-oriented connections rather than their inward-looking structure. Similarly, they prefer to see things not to be structured like trees, but structured like grass, which is rhizomatic: defined by its ability to grow in a multiple number of directions, from an infinite number of points at once, without structure and hierarchy, without an interior, if you like.

For the purposes of this unit, this has an effect on our understanding of subjectivity, seeing us as interconnected rather than individual; with a dynamic outward-oriented possibility, rather than a fixed interior nature limiting what we are able to be; as sources of doing, rather than structures of being.

Their work is not only interested in subjectivity, however. They want to promote the rhizomatic way of looking at the world in other things too. For example, they argue that society in the postmodern world is moving away from a hierarchical arborescent structure to a rhizomatic one. We are starting to arrange things in a rhizomatic rather than an old-fashioned hierarchical way. Older hierarchical institutions are declining to be replaced by rhizomatic ones. A clear example is to compare an older form of information technology like a newspaper with a newer one: the Internet. The newspaper is
hierarchical and arborescent. Authority passes down from the top (the editor/s) to the staff and production workers. All information is transmitted through a centralized process of editing, organization, production and distribution. The Internet, on the other hand, has no centre. Connections can be made rhizomatically: from any point to any other point through an infinite number of channels. These connections can even be made randomly. This does not mean that the Internet, or rhizomes, in fact are completely benign, and without a politics, but they are different, built around a different set of structures with different power arrangements.

DELEUZE AND GUATTARI:
RHIZOMATICS

Introduction Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) Félix Guattari (1936–92)

Capitalism and Schizophrenia
Volume 1: Anti-Oedipus (1972)

“lines of flight”; “schizoanalysis”

Lacan and the Lack in Being
La manque-à-être

The Body without Organs (BwO)
Nietzsche: “there is no ‘being’ behind doing . . . the deed is everything.”

Antonin Artaud (1896–1948)

Deleuze and Guattari: “one cannot write sufficiently in the name of an outside.” (23)

Rhizomatics