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Deleuze and the Internet

by Ian Buchanan

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> I've found myself more and more wary of Google out of some primal lizard-brain fear of giving too much control of my data to one source.
>
> John Battelle.[1]

There can be no doubt that the Internet has transformed practically every aspect of contemporary life, especially the way we think about the body and its relation to identity and to place, once the twin cornerstones of social existence: in social life you are always someone from somewhere, the son or daughter of so-and-so from such-and-such town. These details of our existence, which are essentially historical, although they may sometimes take a form biologists think belongs to their domain (i.e., gender, race, body shape), segment us in different ways, slicing and dicing us this way and that so that we adhere to the conventions and demands of the *socius* itself.

> We are segmented in a *binary* fashion, following the great major dualist oppositions: social classes, but also men-women, adults-children, and so on. We are segmented in a *circular* fashion, in ever larger circles, ever wider disks or coronas, like Joyce's 'letter': my affairs, my neighbourhood's affairs, my city's, my country's, the world's . We are segmented in a *linear* fashion, along a straight line or a number of straight lines, of which each segment represents an episode or 'proceeding': as soon as we finish one proceeding we begin another, forever proceduring or procedured, in the family, in the school, in the army, on the job.[2]

These segmentations penetrate our being, they appear and even feel bodily, especially the apparently natural attributes of gender and race, but they are not for

all that visceral. Deleuze and Guattari are very specific about this. They describe these socially orchestrated captures of the body - gender, race, class, work, family, and so on - as 'incorporeal transformations'. If, today, as Deleuze foresaw with typical acuity in his short paper on what he labelled 'the society of control', our credit card and social security numbers are more significant identity and place markers than the colour of our skin or where we went to school, that isn't because the 'meat' of our bodies has lately been superseded in its cultural significance by our bloodless digital 'profile'. Rather what has happened is that one incorporeal 'apparatus of capture' has been succeeded by another - the segmentations of gender, race and class have been supplanted by the segmentations of debt and credit. "A man is no longer a man confined but a man in debt."[3]

In effect, our body has been replaced as the principal site of power by our profile. But this does not mean that the age of the body has been succeeded by the age of the body without organs as many of the Internet-inclined have argued because the disciplined or segmented body was just as much a body without organs as is the ghostly profile government agencies and banks make of us and store in their databases for referral whenever we want a loan, a driver's license, or to leave the country for a vacation. It will no doubt come as a surprise to many that the clearest confirmation of this point, that the disciplined body is already a body without organs, is to be found in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, which is often read as a history of the body.[4] Referring to Kantorowitz's influential thesis that the King effectively has two bodies, one that lives and dies and another that is immortal, Foucault writes:

> If the surplus power possessed by the king gives rise to the duplication of his body, has not the power exercised on the subjected body of the condemned man given rise to another type of duplication? That of a 'non-corporal', a 'soul', as Maby called it. This history of this 'micro-physics' of the punitive power would then be a genealogy or an element in a genealogy of the modern 'soul'. Rather than seeing this soul as the as the reactivated remnants of an ideology, one would see it as the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body. It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished - and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the

> colonised, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives.[5]

The soul is the body without organs seen in its disciplined aspect, but it is not the whole of the body without organs. Foucault's vision of the duplication of the body is an impoverished one in comparison to Deleuze and Guattari's, and he pays the price of this conceptual diminishment by sheering himself of any plausible means of explaining how or why one might adhere to the conventions and demands of the *socius* itself except through coercion. The full body without organs is the soul animated by desire. Foucault's description of the modern soul is instructive nonetheless because it points up the degree to which the body without organs is a social rather than individual concept: we all have our own body without organs, but it is plugged into a larger entity that is the body without organs of all body without organs, or the plane of consistency. This larger entity that all our individual bodies without organs is plugged into is society's own body without organs and it is my contention that we can only properly understand this particular concept if we apprehend it at this level.

The priority of Marx

As a first measure in standing this concept back onto its feet, then, it has to be recognised that although Antonin Artaud is the source of the phrase 'body without organs' his work plays only a very small part in its theorisation as a concept. This is not to say Artaud is unimportant to Deleuze and Guattari, but the truth is they tend to treat his work as pre-philosophical, as a source of symptoms or ideas rather than concepts. Moreover, focusing on Artaud reinforces the misperception that the body without organs is the exclusive preserve of individuals. Correcting this view requires that we look to the concept's more important conceptual sources: Lacan, Spinoza and Marx. This list is in either ascending or descending order of importance depending on how you look at things: Deleuze and Guattari attribute the invention of the concept to Lacan, but this seems to be of significance only inasmuch as they can use it against Lacanians[6]; they suggest that the architecture of the concept was foreshadowed by Spinoza, and they take from this source the notions of longitude and latitude which they use to map the body without organ's components; they reserve for Marx, however, the special distinction of showing us how this concept works in everyday life at the level of the mode of production. In light of this, I want to argue for the priority of Marx in any reading of the body without organs on the grounds that, to follow a Jamesonian logic, the Marxian position subsumes the other two.[7]

On its first or Lacanian approximation, the body without organs is simply the constellation of partial objects constituting our desire in its transitive mode. It is described by Deleuze and Guattari as the 'real inorganisation' of desire such as one

finds on the reverse side of the Big O. There "desire is shifted into the order of production, related to its molecular elements, where it lacks nothing, because it is defined as the natural and sensuous objective being, at the same time as the Real is defined as the objective being of desire."[8] Desire, on this understanding, constantly surpasses the neat triangle of mommy-daddy-me imposed by psychoanalysis. On its second or Spinozist approximation, the body without organs is "the immanent substance, in the most Spinozist sense of the word; the partial objects [i.e., Lacan's petit a] are like its ultimate attributes, which belong to it precisely insofar as they are really distinct and cannot on this account exclude or oppose one another."[9] But the significance of this insight can really only be seen when it is rewritten into a Marxian discourse, as Deleuze and Guattari do for us in the opening pages of *Anti-Oedipus* . If we want to have some idea of the forces exerted by the body without organs, then we must first establish a parallel between desiring-production and social production. To put it another way, we have to establish that desire functions on the same level as the real. However, Deleuze and Guattari then go onto say this parallel is to be treated as strictly heuristic, at least in the first instance.

> Its one purpose is to point out the fact that the forms of social production, like those of desiring-production, involve an unengendered nonproductive attitude, an element of antiproduction coupled with the process, a full body that functions as a *socius* . This socius may be the body of the earth, that of the tyrant, or capital. This is the body that Marx is referring to when he says that it is not the product of labour, but rather appears as its natural or divine presupposition.[10]

This is the body without organs in its social aspect: "It falls back on (*il se rabat sur)* all production constituting a surface over which the forces and agents of production are distributed, thereby appointing for itself all surplus production and arrogating to itself both the whole and the parts of the process, which now seem to emanate from it as a quasi cause."[11] In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari transform this insight into an analytic principle: the body without organs has two phases: an initial phase of construction and a subsequent phase of making things circulate.[12] Judith Butler has demonstrated that the concept of gender - not the actual the experience of gender - follows precisely this course. What she effectively claims, without using this terminology, is that gender is an incorporeal transformation: the very labels 'man' or 'woman' seize us and transform us. Gender is an attribute - an effect - that penetrates our bodies and functions there as 'quasi cause' of everything we do. We are not born into our gender, we assume it, but once it has taken hold we act in its name. This effect interacts with other effects,

such as race and class. As Butler points out, even if one accepted that it was possible to choose one's gender, it is nevertheless impossible to choose not to have any gender at all. You thus desire on gender, it is part of your body without organs. Gender is a rigged game - you can choose to be man, woman, or transgendered, but you cannot choose to be nongendered because the very notion of 'sex' as some neutral biological (i.e., non-cultural) given is simply the other half of the equation.

Gender and sex work together in a manner Deleuze and Guattari describe as biunivocal. Each effect functions as the concrete proof of existence of the other - this is what it means to say they are quasi causes. We oscillate between the two, jumping from circle of hell to the other. Gender, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is the mechanism power needs to exert itself. Part of the difficulty Butler has in explaining how gender and sex differ from one another (yet operate together) stems from the fact that these terms have the appearance of being, as it were, unengendered or naturally occurring. But, as she effectively wants to argue, but doesn't quite have the vocabulary to do so, these terms are very far from naturally occurring - they are engendered but in such a way that they seem to fall back on themselves and smother their origins from view so as to appear unengendered. This is how the body without organs operates. Its chief operation is to 'fall back on' itself and create a smooth plane for desire. This example points to what is perhaps the key feature of the body without organs: it functions as pure presupposition, that is, the thought or idea which thought cannot grasp. It is like our soul, always there, always in need of work, and always unreachable.

The body without organs is not a 'feedback loop' as Bard and Söderqvist suggest because what occurs on the body without organs is not the same thing, and isn't constructed in the same way as the body without organs itself.[13] What occurs on the body without organs doesn't feed back into it. To continue the example above - if I cross-dress I am maybe playing with my gender, but I'm not thereby altering it, whether on an experiential level or a theoretical level. By the same token, because the body without organs is a virtual entity, Katherine Hayles's complaint that it doesn't pay enough heed to physical constraints is without foundation.[14] More to the point, conceptually the body without organs should be understood as our way of coping with physical constraints. It is our means of fabricating a mental position from which to view the conditions of our everyday life as making sense.

The Internet's body without organs

Presuppositions can sometimes be brought to light by asking: what ought to be? In the first years of the Internet, i.e., the early 1990s, when it was still small enough to be contained on a single mainframe computer, the key permutation of this

question was (according to Bill McKibben) whether it would be like TV, just another distraction, or would it really allow for the kind of connectedness it seemed to enable? He thinks the answer "is still not clear - more people use the Web to look at unclothed young women and lose money at poker than for any other purposes."[15] Setting aside its moralising tone, the contrast with TV is instructive because in its early days it was subjected to considerable scrutiny and regulation by government - the kind of scrutiny and regulation it was subjected to varied quite widely from nation to nation. The Australian government, for instance, regarded it as a service and placed it in the same policy category as health and education. Interestingly, TV was thought too important and too dangerous (it grasped immediately the propaganda power of the new medium) to leave in private hands and policy was developed accordingly. The basic tenets of its policy were that it should be free, available to all (the infrastructural cost of this is staggering when you consider the dispersed nature of the population), and informative (all stations were required to provide news services as well as educational programming for children). It did not opt, however, for complete state control as Britain did, but neither did it leave it all to the market as the US did, although even there the government placed severe restrictions on content. Australia aimed for a kind of middleground that allowed for commercial applications, but kept a close eye on what those applications were. TV was essentially a national technology and the issue of what it could and should be a matter of national debate.

The Internet has never been a national technology in this sense so its development has not been overseen by a governmental body, except in the most *ad hoc* way via band-aid legislation which, in the case of child pornography say, can do nothing more than ban certain practices and create the judiciary conditions needed to punish the offenders, but cannot actually stop it. And that is how things should be according to the majority of Internet pundits, whether e-business billionaires or left-wing academics: Internet equals freedom.[16] This is the Internet's body without organs: the great and unquestioned presupposition that it is an agent of freedom. The "material problem confronting schizoanalysis is knowing whether" the body without organs we have are any good or not, or more to the point, knowing whether we have the means of determining whether they are any good or not.[17] The body without organs is an evaluative concept which, as Guattari instructs in his last book *Chaosmosis*, should be used dialectically, which is to say with a view towards an understanding of how it is produced.[18] In other words we should ask two basic questions: how is a particular body without organs produced? and what circulates on it once it has been produced?

Just how enfeebled a concept of freedom the Internet rhetoric implies was exposed by the press reaction to the story of Google's entry into the Chinese market, which is said to be growing by 20 million users a year and was already

worth an estimated $US151 million per annum in 2004 (a figure that is literally tiny by US standards, but it doesn't take a genius to see that the potential for growth is huge and with everyone predicting that China is going to be the next superpower one can understand why Google would want a foothold). To be allowed to set up servers on mainland China and create a Google.cn service, which will be faster and better suited to purpose than the regular US version Chinese people already have access to, Google had to agree to adhere to the Chinese government's regulation and control of Internet content. This means complying with its three Ts rule: Tibet, Taiwan and Tiananmen are all off limits, as are such search categories as human rights, Amnesty International, pornography, and of course Falun Gong. It is believed that there are 30 000 on-line police monitoring chatrooms, blogs, and news portals, to ensure that these topics aren't discussed and these kinds of sites aren't accessed. Although this isn't the first time Google has agreed to cooperate with government and effectively censor its search results (in Germany it restricts references to sites that deny the Holocaust, while in France it restricts access to sites that incite racial violence), the scale of its compliance with the Chinese government's censorship requirements far exceeds anything it has done before.

That Google chose to make these compromises as the necessary price of doing business in the world's fastest growing economy was read by many as a betrayal of the values of freedom Google is supposedly an emblem of. The fact that these jeremiads were largely confined to the business pages of liberal papers suggests that the notion of freedom they had in mind was largely of the freedom-to-do-business kind wrapped up in the rhetoric of freedom of speech. This obviously self-serving acquiescence to censorship is defended by the company on the grounds that "providing no information (or a heavily degraded user experience that amounts to no information) is more inconsistent".[19] What this case demonstrated is that Google isn't really concerned about our access to content at all. All the blustery talk about compromised values was really just a verbal smokescreen trying to cover up this one glaring truth: Google's priority is its access to new markets and it will not hesitate to compromise its putative ethic of 'do no evil' in order to achieve that goal. If we regard Google as a gigantic multinational corporation, which with a net worth in excess of $US80 billion (making it bigger than either Coke, General Motors or McDonald's) it in fact is, then there should be little to surprise us in its about-face in China. It is only if we continue to buy into the fantasy that it and somehow the Internet as a whole is a bastion of freedom that we find these events dismaying. If the Internet was ever a 'commons' to use the word anti-corporate commentators like Naomi Klein have made fashionable, then there can be no doubt that it is rapidly being 'enclosed', the implication being that Amazon, Google and eBay are still only the 'primitive accumulation' stage. Information is in effect a natural resource like oil that Google exploits without regard for the environment (as oil companies do when we aren't

watching and sometimes even when we are watching).[20]

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Google-led hype surrounding the convergence of Internet and mobile phone. In an Op Ed for the *Financial Times* Google CEO Eric Schmidt went on record saying that Internet enabled mobile phones would effectively solve the problem of how to gain access to emerging markets in underdeveloped countries where the absence of landline infrastructure would otherwise have proved an impassable obstacle. He doesn't put it like that, of course. He's never so indelicate as to mention the dirty word 'market'. His rhetoric is libratory and egalitarian. The Internet has democratised information, Schmidt claims, or at least it has for those who have access to it. And that he says is the problem: not everyone has access! In Sub-Saharan Africa, Schmidt laments, less than 1% of households have a landline. If that statistic wasn't bad enough for a business that presupposes the existence of such basic utilities as a functioning telephonic network, then there is the even worse news that if broadband was available to every household it wouldn't change things all that much because very few people in this region of the world can afford computers. Mobile phones will liberate this technologically dark part of the world by overcoming these twin obstacles to on-line access. On the blessed day when everyone has Internet enabled mobile phones, a "schoolchild in Africa will be able [.] to find research papers from around the world or to see ancient manuscripts from a library in Oxford ." Until then, however, the "digital divide" prevents this democratising magic from having its effect. According to Schmidt, thanks to the Internet we don't have to take what business, the media or politicians say "at face value" and this is empowering. Schmidt's view is that what is actually said on-line isn't as important as the 'freedom' to say whatever one happens to want to say. Thus, he says, governments should stop focusing on how to control the Web and "concentrate on how to give Internet access to more people in more countries." Government should, in other words, help Google to expand its market.[21]

By the same token, as Google's negative response to requests for assistance in tracking down users of child pornography from US law and enforcement agencies illustrates, Google thinks the government shouldn't be allowed to impinge on its market. Although Yahoo, MSN and AOL have been willing to help out, Google has held fast citing the right to privacy as its rationale. But Google patently speaks with a forked tongue on this subject. Co-founder of Google, Larry Page, defended the company's refusal to help identify child pornographers by saying, rather tellingly, that the company relies on the trust of its users and that giving out data on users would break that trust. His implication is obvious: if Google gave out data on its users it would effectively turn customers away and eventually lose its pre-eminent place as market leader. Protecting market share is how we should understand Page's call for legislation that stops government from being able to ask for such data in the first place.[22]

But this doesn't mean Google actually respects the privacy of its users, if by that one means it doesn't keep them under surveillance: it is constantly gathering data on users, individually and collectively, and even publicises this fact (under the innocuous sounding rubric of Google Trends) by releasing 'maps' of most frequently searched topics broken down by region. Eschewing any pretence to scientificity, these search maps make for titillating reading as one ponders what it means in cultural-geographical terms that the most frequent Google searches in the city of St Albans in Hertfordshire were for gyms, weight loss, and the Atkins diet. Does this make it the "most self-absorbed city in Britain " as claimed by *The Sunday Times* (UK) in a half-page piece studded with such titbits of spurious psycho-social information gleaned from Google Trends?[23] Obviously more of a lifestyle than hard news piece, although it was in the news section, what is particularly striking about this article is its complete lack of sensitivity to the fact that such maps are the product of electronic surveillance (i.e., precisely the kind of thing *The Sunday Times* normally rails against). That a liberal paper like this doesn't see Google Trends as surveillance is evidence of just how little critical attention is paid to this dimension of the Internet in the public sphere.[24] But I don't want to give the impression that this is some kind of conspiracy because the fact is Google is very open about its snooping - one Google executive, Marissa Mayer, has even said we should expect it.[25]

The Rhizome

Is the Internet a rhizome? All the straws in the wind say 'yes' it is.

> Whereas mechanical machines are inserted into hierarchically organised social systems, obeying and enhancing this type of structure, the Internet is ruled by no one and is open to expansion or addition at anyone's whim as long as its communication protocols are followed. This contrast was anticipated theoretically by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari especially in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), in which they distinguished between arboreal and rhizomic cultural forms. The former is stable, centred, hierarchical; the latter is nomadic, multiple, decentred - a fitting depiction of the difference between a hydroelectric plant and the Internet.[26]

There are of course excellent grounds for thinking that the Internet meets some if not all of the basic criteria of the rhizome, which Deleuze and Guattari list as follows:[27]

- The rhizome connects any point to any other point (connections do not

have to be between same and same, or like and like).

- The rhizome cannot be reduced to either the One or the multiple because it is composed of dimensions (directions in motion) not units. Consequently no point in the rhizome can be altered without altering the whole.
- The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture and offshoots (not reproduction).
- The rhizome pertains to an infinitely modifiable map with multiple entrances and exits that must be produced.
- The rhizome is acentred, nonsignifying, and acephalous.
- The rhizome isn't amenable to any structural or generative model.

So, how well does the Internet map against these six principles? At the 'bare machine' level (to adapt Agamben) it seems to agree with the first principle very closely. The ideal of the Internet is that any computer can be connected to any other computer. How well this works in practice is another matter altogether as anyone who has experienced the frustration of trying to access 'big' sites using low bandwidth connections (such as dial-up) or has had to rely on servers clogged by high volumes of traffic can readily attest. But the more interesting philosophical question here, which applies as much to Deleuze and Guattari as the Internet, is the premium we place on intention: until the advent of search engines of the capability of Google, it was extremely difficult to implement one's intent in relation to the Internet. The phrase, 'surfing the Internet', reflects this: using the Internet used to be (and in some cases still is) like looking for a needle in a haystack, and basically what one did in order to find something was 'surf' from one site to another until one found it (hence the proliferation in the early 1990s of books listing 'useful' websites, which themselves tended to be indexes or directories enabling you to find other sites - by the same token, little attention was given to domain names at this time, with the result many of them looked like nightmarish calculus equations rather than the user-friendly mnemonics we're accustomed to now). You moved from one Web address to another as though from one fixed point in space to another, which interestingly is not all what surfers do.[28]

This brings us to the second principle: here the match is a little less straightforward. For a start, the practical reality of the Internet is nothing at all like the multi-dimensional sensorium envisaged by William Gibson when he first used the term 'cyberspace' in his groundbreaking novel *Neuromancer*, but then again he famously didn't even own a computer at the time. However Gibson's vision of cyberspace has had lasting influence and many people do think of the Internet as

the realisation of the Deleuzian ideal of multiplicity. But the incredible proliferation and constantly expanding number of websites does not by itself mean that the Internet can be classed as a multiplicity in Deleuze's sense. Are websites dimensions or units of the web? There is a simple way to answer this question - what happens when we add or subtract a site? The answer is that it isn't clear that the addition or the subtraction of any one site actually affects the whole. If several million sites were to vanish then that would clearly make a difference, but the loss of a few hundred or even several thousand might not. If sites were dimensions then according to Deleuze and Guattari's definition of the rhizome their removal would alter the whole, so we have to conclude that individual websites are units of the Internet, not dimensions. Empirically we know that the number of websites is important; there is for example a vast difference between the Internet of today, which has hundreds of millions of specific sites, and trillions of pages to go with them, and the Internet of 1990, which had fewer than two hundred sites and could be contained in its totality on a single PC. But this doesn't mean we have to abandon the idea that the Internet is a multiplicity because there is another way we can come at this problem.

Thus we come to the third principle, that the rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture and offshoots (not reproduction), which is essentially a matter of population, which in contrast to the numbering number can be grasped in dimensional terms. Darwin 's two great insights were, according to Deleuze and Guattari, that the population is more significant than the type in determining the genetic properties of a species, and that change occurs not through an increase in complexity, such as the proliferation of individual websites or multiplication of weblinks entails, but rather the opposite, through simplification. Internet usage certainly bears this point out as recent trends confirm - the Internet is the standard source of product information, everything from details of the latest designs to replacement user manuals are lodged there; it is also becoming the preferred point of sale as more and more business is conducted on-line; it is steadily taking over from its rivals TV and Radio the role of content provision, as podcasts and downloads become more the rule the exception. In the process the Internet is changing how we understand 'media' - on the one hand, it is steadily displacing the variety of media that used to exist (newspapers, magazines, TV, Radio and Cinema) onto itself; while on the other hand, it is absorbing new interactive functions, such as data searches and direct on-line sales, the other media can't offer. Paradoxically, then, from the perspective of the user the Internet is without doubt the most powerful homogenising and standardising machine invented since money. First of all, all pre-existing media has been compelled to adapt itself to suit the Internet environment; second, having stripped the media of its exclusive preserve to make and distribute news, movies or whatever, the Internet has 'enabled' a whole new kind of media production, from the so-called 'citizen journalists' we hear so much about today, to bloggers,

to home-movie makers and amateur pornographers. Viewed from the perspective of the media as a whole (i.e., from a population perspective), the Internet has simplified what media means and in the process set off a massive expansion of media operations into virtually every corner of existence. It is having the same effect on retail.

The fourth principle, that the rhizome pertains to an infinitely modifiable map with multiple entrances and exits that must be produced, is I would hazard the most important. But its implications are neither obvious nor fully explained by Deleuze and Guattari, although it is clear that it has the highest priority in their view. In effect, what it means is this: the rhizome is not manifest in things, but rather a latent potential that has to be realised by experimentation. This can linked to the sixth principle, namely that the rhizome isn't amenable to any structural or generative model because basically what Deleuze and Guattari are saying is that you can't either prescribe the Internet into existence or expect to find it naturally occurring. It has to be invented. The rhizome is the subterranean pathway connecting all our actions, invisibly determining our decision to do this rather than that. Insofar as we remain unaware of its existence and indeed its operation we do not have full control over our lives. The rhizome is in this sense a therapeutic tool. "For both statements and desires, the issue is never to reduce the unconscious or to interpret it or to make it signify according to a tree model. The issue is to *produce the unconscious*, and with it new statements, different desires: the rhizome is precisely this production of the unconscious."[29] The rhizome of the Internet cannot simply be the pre-existing network of connected computers. Rather we have to conceive it terms of the set of choices that have been made concerning its use and determine the degree to which the resulting grid is 'open' or 'closed'.

The fifth principle - that the rhizome is acentred, nonsignifying, and acephalous - appears to be one that could be left unchallenged. Yet, if we were to grant that the Internet is acentred, nonsignifying, and acephalous in appearance and indeed in its very construction, the reality of its day-to-day use still does not live up to this much-vaunted Deleuzian ideal. Here we have to remind ourselves that Deleuze and Guattari regard the rhizome as a tendency rather than a state of being. It must constantly compete with an equally strong tendency in the opposite direction, namely towards what they term the 'arboreal'. The Internet exhibits arboreal tendencies as well rhizomatic tendencies and any balanced assessment of it would have to take these into account too and weigh up their relative strength. To begin with, one still moves from point to point through the Internet - there is no liberated line of flight in cyberspace. Moreover, Google searches are very far from disinterested, as John Battelle's pathbreaking book *The Search* makes abundantly clear. Now that retailers can pay Google to link certain search items (what Google calls AdWords) to their business name, so that a search for a book, for instance,

will always lead to Amazon or Abebooks or whoever, the minimal conceptual distinction that used to separate Google from the Yellow Pages has basically vanished.[31] The operating premise of Google searches may not be that when whenever we are searching, no matter what we are searching for, we are actually looking for something to buy, but its results certainly appear to obey this code. Insofar as we rely on Google as our user's guide to Internet, the Internet we actually see and use is thus 'stable, centred, and hierarchical', i.e., the very opposite of rhizomatic. Google searches are conducted on a 'stable' electronic snapshot of the Internet, not the living breathing thing itself, which it indexes very precisely; the search engine is patently a centring system, de facto and de jure, and what could be more hierarchical than PageRank? This is not to say that Google isn't an extremely useful tool, because plainly it is; but it is to insist not only that it has its limitations, some of which are quite serious, but that isn't the only means of searching for information available.

A new problematic?

If we were to follow Deleuze's watchword, that philosophy has the concepts it deserves according to how well it formulates its problems, then we would not start from the idea that the Internet might be a body without organs or looks like a rhizome or indeed any other pre-existing point of view. Instead we would try to see how the Internet works and develop our concepts from there.

In its first flush, the Internet seemed to be about connectedness, but that idea has since been exposed as a perhaps necessary but nonetheless impossible ideal (like the Lacanian conception of sexual relations), that we are at once compelled to try to realise and destined never to succeed in doing. Now, though, Battelle's work has made it is clear that the Internet is much more about searching than connecting. Although connecting people - strangers with strangers, friends with friends - is a major feature of the Internet's cultural role, it is predominantly used to search for objects, i.e., commodities, and in the case of pornography and celebrity gossip one may well say it is searching for people in their guise as commodities. A lot of quite utopian claims have been made on behalf of the Internet, the strongest being that it has so changed the way people interact it has created a new mode of politics. But it now seems clear that it is just another 'model of realisation', Deleuze and Guattari's term for the institutions capitalism relies on to extract surplus value from a given economy. That business couldn't immediately figure out how to make money out of the Internet, i.e., turn it into a 'model of realisation', meant that in the early years of its existence the utopian image of it as an affirmative agent of cultural change was able to flourish, giving the Internet a powerful rhetorical legacy it continues to draw on as it is moulded more and more firmly into a purely commercial enterprise.

Google is effectively the commonsense understanding of what using the Internet actually means, both practically and theoretically. It is at once our abstract ideal of searching and our cumulatively acquired empirical understanding of it. But more importantly, searching is what we think of as the proper practice associated with the Internet - one writes with a pen, makes calls with a phone, and searches the Internet. When our searches don't yield the results we're after we tell ourselves it is because we don't properly understand Google, that we don't have enough practical experience with it, or sufficient competence to use it fully, rather than dismiss the search engine itself as fundamentally flawed. It is in this precise sense that Google has become, in noological terms, the 'image of the search'.[32] Google's significance is clearly more cultural than technical because it determines our view of Internet technology itself, deciding for us - in advance and without discussion - what it is actually for. If the problem in the early days of the Internet was that no-one could foresee the range of its applications and seemed to stand around waiting for history instead of putting in place the appropriate legislation and policy to guide its development some now think of as missing, the problem today is that everyone thinks they know what its application should be - the facilitation of sales - and any sense that it might have a more progressive use has been consigned to the dustbin of fantasy. If there is something the matter with the Internet it is that its utopian beginnings block critical thoughts about its future, as though somehow its starting point was already the fabled end of history when the concrete and abstract become one.

John Battelle says he wrote *The Search* because it was his sense that Google and its rival search engine companies had somehow figured out how to 'jack into' our "culture's nervous system".[33] His account of the seemingly inexorable rise of the search engine giant, which is largely a standard corporate biography, is by turns alarmist and infatuated, he is in equal measure amazed by Google's power and disturbed by it. It is, however, Battelle's attempt to use Google's history to say something about contemporary culture that makes for the most fascinating reading and whether we agree with his prognosis or not I think we have to take it seriously. There can be no doubt that the Internet is going to play an increasingly significant role in shaping cultural attitudes, behaviours and practices in the future. His decision not to write a book about Google per se but rather something like a Google-effect is undoubtedly wise. As much of a behemoth as Google is, there's no guarantee that it will be around forever. It may disappear, as AOL appears to be doing as its business model founders in the face of Google's, or it may be swallowed up by an even more aggressive predator such as Microsoft (presently three times the size of Google measured in terms of market capitalisation), which virtually wiped out its one-time competitor Netscape Navigator in the so-called 'browser wars' of the 1990s. By the same token, none of the other major corporations - not eBay or Amazon or even the venerable Microsoft - can be considered immune to such forces of change. Indeed Wall

Street is worried that Microsoft won't be able to shake off the competition - it has no answer to Apple's iTunes and it is losing the battle to control the Web.[34] It has also lately been reported that Google and Yahoo, as well as Microsoft, are cooking up plans to encroach on eBay's turf, though so far the results are disappointing to investors. But the business sector at least sees it as both inevitable and desirable - commercial users of eBay apparently feel they have maxed out on that service and to reach new customers they need access to new providers.[35]

The Internet seems to engender a kind of restlessness in us to always want see what's just over the horizon, one click away. The success of Amazon, Google and eBay (amidst the blaze of spectacular dot.com failures of the past decade) is intimately related to the way their sites facilitate searching. Google's strength in this regard is obvious, but we shouldn't overlook just how good Amazon and eBay are in their own highly localised domains. What these companies have cottoned onto is something we might call 'search engine culture'. The Internet thrives not because it can be searched, but because the search engines we use to navigate it respond to and foster the desire to search by constantly rewarding us with the little satisfactions of the unexpected discovery. A potent search engine makes us feel that the world really is at our fingertips, that we are verily 'becoming-world'. One can find objective evidence of the intensifying influence of 'search engine culture' in the constant consumer demand for increased bandwidth and memory capacity to facilitate it. Most households in the West possess vastly more computing power than they could hope to use, except for such activities as searching the Web. It may be that on-line business is only just now starting to take off and show genuine profits because it has only lately developed an appreciation of the architecture of the desire called 'searching'. As John Lanchester puts it, Google "has a direct line, if not quite to the unconscious dreaming mind of the world, at least to the part of it which voices its wishes."[36] I believe the same is true of Amazon and eBay and indeed a range of other Internet services such as online dating and grocery shopping that are yet to produce corporations of the gigantic proportions as these icons.[37] But I don't accept that Google is the global id, as Lanchester puts it, because to do so is to accept that our deepest atavistic desire is to buy something and there could be no more dystopian outlook than that. Neither is it the global body without organs, though with a bit of work it could be and who knows what changes that might ring?

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FOOTNOTES

1. Cited in *The Economist,* September 1, 2007, p 52.

2. Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 208-9 (ellipsis in original).

3. Deleuze 1990: 181.

4. Foucault's heartfelt acknowledgment of the importance of Deleuze and Guattari's work to his own thinking is obviously not unimportant in this respect.

5. Foucault 1977: 29.

6.Lacan, they say, "is not content to turn, like the analytic squirrel, inside the wheel of the Imaginary and the Symbolic; he refuses to be caught up in the Oedipal Imaginary and the oedipalising structure, the imaginary identity of persons and the structural unity of machines, everywhere knocking against the impasses of a molar representation that the family closes around itself." Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 308.

7. Jameson 1981: 10; 47.

8. Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 311.

9. Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 327.

10. Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 10.

11. Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 10.

12. Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 152.

13. Bard and Söderqvist 2002: 113.

14. Hayles 2001: 154.

15. McKibben 2006: 4.

16. It is perhaps worth observing that in this sense the Internet is fundamentally anti-socialist: it will not accept dirigisme of any description.

17. Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 165.

18. Guattari 1995: 12.

19. Cited in *The Guardian,* January 25, p 3.

20. Jameson's claim that culture is the new nature is thus shown to be substantially true.

21. All quotes are taken from: Eric Schmidt "Let more of the world access the Web", *Financial Times*, May 22, 2006, p 15.

22. Cited in *The Guardian*, January 25, p 3.

23.*The Sunday Times*, May 21 2006, p13 (news section).

24. This issue has not been ignored in academic discourse, e.g., Solove 2004 and Hui and Chun 2006, but the emphasis there is overwhelmingly on the activities of governments.

25. Cited in *The Observer*, January 22, p 24 (focus section).

26. Poster 2001: 27.

27. All the following points are lifted from Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21.

28. As Deleuze himself recognised, surfing is one of those sports in which the "key thing is how to get taken up in the motion of a big wave, a column of rising air, to 'get into something' instead of being the origin of an effort." Deleuze 1995: 121.

29. Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 18.

30. As clear an instance as one could find of language "falling under the domain of private property." Poster 2001: 39.

31. But in a sense, all Google is doing is making a commercial strength out of what has always been a weakness in its operating system: Google's famous PageRank algorithm is anything but immune to influence. Its basic premise that the more traffic a site receives the more significant it is, has meant that it is prey to the influence of spammers who simply bombard a particular site until its rank changes. There are even companies promising that for a fee they can elevate a site's ranking, thus enhancing its market presence (popular wisdom has it that people rarely look beyond the first page of results - a ranking of 50 or worse is basically death for an Internet business relying on Google traffic). Google is alert to this and black-bans companies it thinks are guilty of such practices. But ultimately its best defence against this has been to abandon (albeit unofficially) the idea of 'organic' searches, that is searches which aren't influenced by the 'invisible hand' of market forces.

32. Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 374.

33. Battelle 2005: 2.

34. As reported in the Business section of *The Guardian*, May 14, 2006, p 3.

35. As reported in the Business section of *The Sunday Times*, February 5, 2006, p39.

36. Lanchester 2006: 5.

37. But having said this, it also needs to be pointed out that the on-line businesses other than the big three make up more than 80% of the business as a whole. As Battelle (2005: 154) informs us, Amazon's 2000 revenue was $US2.76 billion at a time when Internet business was worth $US25 billion annually.

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