Gilles Deleuze: The Intensive Reduction
Edited by Constantin Boundas

Gilles Deleuze: The Intensive Reduction is a compilation of eighteen essays first presented at an international conference at Trent University in 2004. Boundas introduces the volume by way of a question, how does one pay tribute to a master—such as Deleuze? The answer: by proliferating his senses, contributing to the unlimited glossalia that Deleuze identifies as the creative possibility of philosophy. The essays in this volume form an assemblage of a truly Deleuzian nature, rhizomatic offshoots that take his philosophy down aberrant paths. The “golden thread,” as the title suggests, is the intensive. The intensive relates to forces or affects in the process of becoming, contrasting the more familiar domain of fully formed entities, the extensive. The intensive is characterized by qualitative differences of relational elements in process or flux. In Deleuze’s terminology, the intensive is associated with the virtual rather than the actual. Deleuze is particularly interested in uncovering the intensive dynamism that exist in tandem with the domain of the extensive, which is the usual focus of philosophic inquiry. The intensive is Deleuze’s contribution to the expansion of philosophy’s explanatory power. It undergirds most all of his inquiries. It is for this reason that Boundas claims that Deleuze is irretrievable without acknowledging virtual intensity as the generative milieu at the heart of his thought. All being has to be accounted for in terms of intensity as the anti-phenomenal, non-resembling different/ciation of a field of forces, the emphasis on which providing each contributor the opportunity to retrieve a contested and poorly understood point of Deleuze’s philosophy. Several misguided tendencies in Deleuze interpretation are addressed throughout the book, contributing to the sense that this is a book for the already initiated. One might consider reading these essays as a corrective to some of the more persistent and widespread caricatures abounding. For instance, Boundas
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cites the tendency to emphasize the imperative of creation without the commensurate re-positioning of ethics according to a Spinozist model of affirmation. Likewise, Deleuzian politics, often misunderstood exclusively as resistance and destruction, is refined only by consideration of the precision involved in creation born out of the intensive.

The book is divided into four sections, the first dealing with Deleuze’s general ontological commitments and envisioning the future possibilities inherent in thinking through the Virtual. Véronique Bergens “Deleuze and the Question of Ontology” orients the reader by placing Deleuze in relation to Kant. Where the progression of ontology is foreclosed by Kantian schematism, Deleuze provides a model, transcendental empiricism, whereby the inaccessibility of the *noumenon* is overcome. The shift happens according to the presentation of an image of thought that relies on the breakdown of the faculties rather than their accord. Ontic failure leads to the intuition of the intensive realm of differential forces. The question motivating Bergen derives from the work of Francois Zourabichivili: “the question that every reader of Deleuze must confront […] is how this thinker could coordinate two positions […] the transcendental and the ontological” (ft.1, 19). What Bergen calls the ascent to the transcendental field of experience happens by way of thought reaching its limits, just where Kant will not allow it to go. Deleuze embraces the limit as the moment of liberation of thought: “thought posits itself when the adjustment of an object to the forms of knowledge breaks down” (9). As Bergen explains it, there is no problem - thought becomes the fold of Being as Event understood as commerce with the conditions of real experience, the Virtual. Yet, after explaining all this, Bergen poses a series of open questions, which seem to boil down to asking what guarantees this ontological “leap”: “lifting the focus from the actual does not ipso facto bring about a new focus on the virtual” (17). It is less about refocus than it is about intrusion, and Bergen acknowledges this as “shock” (15). But does she domesticate Deleuze by assuming that this shock is supposed to induce an “agreement and an adequation with the plan of Being” (15)? Bergen
charges that it is Deleuze re-instantiating the necessity of representation, but if representation is not the goal of this intuition, then her criticism appears less potent. The second essay, “The ‘Future’ of Deleuze An Unfinished Project,” continues thinking *impuissance* as a constitutive break or caesura, but switches focus by tackling ontology in terms of time. Baross moves from thinking Deleuze’s future of thought to the sense of the future that his work engenders, drawing from Bergsonian duration and the syntheses of time in *Difference and Repetition*. The future is redeployed as the eternity of the forever new, meaning that Deleuze is less interested in a future to come than the new (future) as a dimension of the present and as synthesis of the past. The point of caesura is what he calls the *imprévisible*—though a synthesis, the future is structured by a series of cuts that shatter mere repetition, thus providing the possibility of creating new, unforeseeable futures. The third and fourth essays in this section continue the trend of following the intersecting lines of Deleuze and his predecessors, taking up Leibniz and Whitehead respectively. Bogue’s emphasis on the new harmony of the Baroque underscores this point, drawing together the fold between Leibniz’s monads and bodies in terms of the heterogeneous harmony of the musical chord. Rather than pre-established harmony, the emphasis falls to dissonant accords, the minor elements of Baroque style which integrate series as temporary and unstable phases. It is the freeing of the model, the creation of the new melody and the coexistence of future worlds that resonates with Deleuzian ontology, thus adding another Deleuzian theme, the reciprocity between philosophy and the non-philosophy of art. Lastly, one encounters Whitehead, as Robinson retrieves this more marginal figure from Deleuze’s texts, drawing them together in terms of their ontological constructivism. The synthesis involved in Baross’s “future” doubles as a motif for the section as Deleuzian ontology of the future is connected to underdeveloped reverberations of tradition and temporality, or as Robinson is keen to point out, “a number of authors were already ‘behind’ him” (47), making of this section a kind of vibratory whole.
The second section explores the complex intersections of Deleuze and Lacan, clarifying the development of his thought toward schizoanalysis out of the encounter with Lacanian theories of desire and the Real. “On the Idea of a Critique of Pure Practical Reason in Kant, Lacan, and Deleuze” leaves one pivotal figure out of the title, Sade. This omission is curious considering that it is the linkage of Kant and Sade as inverted bedfellows, which allows him to suggest the necessity of a critique of pure practical reason and move on to Lacan’s attempt at it. Desire producing its own lost object accounts for the presupposition of the transcendent object of law-abiding will in both cases. Recognizing this is to move beyond a certain kind of moralism, to jump over to the side of unconscious and desire, the home of both Lacan and Deleuze, whom Cutrofello artfully weaves together. Radicalizing rather than repudiating Lacan, Deleuze’s desire is machinic rather than symbolic, not a faculty of a unified subject but a function of a differential manifold. This essay makes clear the debt to the innovations of Lacan’s theory of desiring production. Cutrofello ends with a provocative twist: Deleuze’s way out of oedipal tyranny is to embrace Sade’s irony and perversion, to release desiring production from its bondage, yet if Kant and Sade are themselves inseparable, what is the status of Deleuze’s Sadean schizo? The next essay, by Shannon Winnubst, proves to be a complement to the first in which Sade and Kant become indistinguishable and Lacan is Deleuze’s ally. She examines the absurdity of law without content or as pure form (maxim), and she locates the misreading of Lacan with those who remain at the level of the Symbolic/Phallus and do not account for his move to object a. Object a rather than the Other is the cause of desire, thus indicating the limits of the Symbolic and re-emergence of the Lacanian Real as a site amenable to Deleuze’s project of subversion of and laughter at the law. Daniel Smith’s essay also helps to clarify the relation of Deleuze to Lacan, locating Deleuze’s formulation of the body-without-organs through the re-reading of Lacan and reworking of his own philosophy. Countering Žižek’s claims that Anti-Oedipus represents a move away from Lacanian presuppositions, Smith finds
that the Lacanian Real revealed in psychosis provides the model for schizoanalysis, the plunge into the depths of the Real itself rather than remaining tied to the model of Logic of Sense where the Real is only ever mediated through an oscillation of surface effects. The body-without-organs, “the Real in all its positivity” (92), replaces the language of surface-depth. Smith’s essay is helpful in clarifying the progression of this term.

The third section, “Deleuze and the Arts”, includes three essays that trace the creative activity of thinking the Virtual as a specific power of art—though the emphasis of each in addressing this specificity is distinct enough to keep the reader intrigued. Darren Ambrose’s essay provides a helpful overview of the symbiotic relationship between art and philosophy in Deleuze, while highlighting the need for philosophy to take heed of the artists ability to negotiate the “self-positing element of materiality” (119). Two points of interest in this essay are the characterization of materiality in terms of auto-poetic virtual traits and the elaboration of the diagram. In the next essay, Deleuze is paired with Merleau-Ponty in order to reflect the move beyond phenomenology to the level of the Virtual, thus providing a more complete description of the work of art. The essay uses the notion of Gestalt as a hinge, a swinging door that both opens the importance of Merleau-Ponty’s recognition of the conditions of perception for Deleuze and forecloses the phenomenological circuit by allowing Deleuze to conceive the collapse of the Gestalt as flesh flowing out of itself, a flight to the intensive that conditions this element of the world. The final essay of this section returns the reader to an earlier theme, that of the breakdown or disintegration of the unity of the subject or thought. Baugh explains that Deleuze takes the possibilities of literature farther than the modernist death of the reader, insisting that reading is a matter of increasing the impersonal power within us and, thus, “getting lost” from one’s self. Rather than identifying with the characters and strengthening the unity of the ego, the Deleuzian imperative is to encounter the intensities of affect and perception released by the characters (136). Art, in breaching our limits, lets the intensive in, exposing our bodies to
imperceptible forces and powers that lead to the transformation of thought and action.

The fourth section, a markedly longer section of the book, addresses Deleuze’s oft-contested and more often misunderstood impact on the ethical and political. The significance of the disproportional allotment of space to this section warrants further scrutiny and suggests to this reader a refreshing preoccupation in current Deleuze studies, that of the confrontation between the ontological and the political and the folding of the theoretical and the practical that Deleuze makes possible. Though, according to Phillip Mengue’s essay in the section, this is just what has been lacking in the conventional interpretations of micropolitics practicality and political efficacy. Mengue’s essay performs a double reduction, reducing past formulations of micropolitics to “anti-capitalist ethics” and reducing its revival to the doxic free market of democracy (172). His analysis relies upon some problematic twists, interpreting becoming as return. Making revolution a matter of coming back to ones own conditions allows Mengue to then assert his agenda: “what makes the ‘revolutionary’ of the revolution is the climbing back or the coming back—the rememoration of the condition of being together with people to the very void of knowing what society should be” (166) and “peoples revolutionary becoming is internal to democracy” (168). The public space of discussion and contestation internal to democracy is thus what Deleuze has been looking for all along. The doxic plane acts as the plane of immanence. This has the benefit, for Mengue, of rendering diffusion and contamination, processes that Deleuze maintains to be organic, chemical, affective processes, intelligible as an authentic politics by making contagion “pass through speech and discourse” (174). Yet Deleuze’s point in critiquing the hegemony of semiotic/linguistic systems in favor of enunciative assemblages is to underscore the level of the affective/intensive /force that exceeds the human and even the organic, thus complicating the analysis of nomadological engagements. Mengue acknowledges that his reading is against the Deleuzian grain, but thinks that he is providing a means by which micropolitics can be a legitimate pol-
itics. Beaulieu’s “Gilles Deleuze Politics” is helpful in providing a counter point in that he emphasizes the peculiarity of nomadism, that it may never be legitimate, complete, or institutionalized (210). Mengue’s final analysis is that “otherworldly nomadism” just cannot be politics; it is too diaphanous and dispersed, yet his alignment of Deleuze’s own position concerning nomadism and an overly ide- alistic postmodern vision of the abolition of all borders (absolute deterritorialization) strikes me as one of the reductive gestures that this book seeks to root out. Patton’s “Deleuze’s Practical Philoso- phy” offers just such a rejoinder, presenting a more nuanced view of the values of kinds of deterritorializing forces and thus illustrating that Deleuze’s nomadological path is not as nebulous as some have supposed. In most of the essays of this section, the prospects of a practical Deleuze are gauged to be brighter. Several, like Braidotti’s “Affirmation versus Vulnerability,” argue that the foundation from which we think ethics and politics, as well as the subjects involved, shifts with nomadology, micropolitics and the intensive ontology underlying them both. Braidotti focuses on the intensive subject, as a locale of variations, connections and limitations. The point of ethics is to explore this locale, the body, and push it to its limits. As with Baugh’s position concerning the loss of self in the process of reading, the experience of loss and vulnerability is an occasion for transformation and leads to the interesting and topical concept of multi-locality, the mindset of the diasporic and nomadic. These transformative processes not only “rework the consciousness of social injustice and discrimination but also produce a more adequate cartography of our real-life condition” (150). Holland’s “Affirmative Nomadology and the War Machine” is noteworthy in that it maintains allegiance to Deleuze’s thought while offering real examples of how to apply it. The war machine is only the reactive, destructive part of nomadism. There is also affirmative nomadism; this is his focus. In the final essay, Villani introduces the idea of pairing at a distance, which suggests that the space opened up in the writing of philosophy is determined by the ability to sustain contraries or extremes. According to Villani, this is what Deleuze likes in past
philosophers such as Kant, Spinoza, Nietzsche; one could say that this is also what he creates in his own—an intensive ontology of differentiation that contains all differences and infinitely unfolds upon itself. The philosophical leap to which Villani refers characterizes the creative engagement of thought that is celebrated in these pages.

The overall aim of the book to extend Deleuze in several directions and break from the sedimentation of his thought is accomplished to a greater or lesser degree throughout. The book succeeds in linking the diverse fields of Deleuze’s thought to the intensive, proving a worthwhile contribution to the elucidation and extension of his work.

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