The Atheist Machine

My focus in this chapter is on what I will call the atheist machine, the multiple uses and effects of which are expressed throughout the productions, registrations, and consumptions of the literary corpus of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In their first co-authored book, *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and his frequent collaborator Felix Guattari challenged the psychoanalytic idealization and capitalist appropriation of Oedipus, and set out a plan in which—or a plane on which—a new set of questions could be productively engaged: “Given a certain effect, what machine is capable of producing it? And given a certain machine, what can it be used for?” Using the language of *A Thousand Plateaus*, we could say that the abstract machine of adaptive atheism produces rhizomic lines of flight whose absolute deterritorialization molecularizes the transcendent pretenses of monotheistic molarities. I will argue that the atheist machine is always at work wherever schizoanalysis (or rhizomatics, micropolitics, pragmatics, etc.) proceeds, as long as it proceeds.

In their last co-authored book, *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari argued that “Wherever there is transcendence, vertical Being, imperial State in the sky or on earth, there is religion; and there is Philosophy only where there is immanence... only friends can set out a plane of immanence as a ground from which idols have been cleared.” When it comes to dealing with priestly erections of arborescent icons within a religious Imaginarium, the schizoanalytic task of the Deleuzian Friend is definitely destructive. “Destroy, destroy. The whole task of schizoanalysis goes by way of destruction...” As the last few sections of *Anti-Oedipus* make clear, however, this destruction is inextricably linked to the positive and creative tasks of schizoanalysis.

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1 This chapter is an adapted version of “The Atheist Machine,” which was originally published in Powell-Jones and Shults, eds., *Gilles Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). Like some of the earlier essays in the current book, the original version of this chapter utilized a more generic definition of anthropomorphic promiscuity and sociographic prudery. I have reworked this version significantly to render it consistent with the stipulated (and fractionable) definitions outlined in Chapter 1.


After a brief review of the relation between atheism and schizonalysis in Deleuze’s work, I return to the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 1. As we have seen, insights derived from empirical findings and theoretical developments within the bio-cultural sciences of religion can help us understand how and why gods are so easily born(e) in human minds and groups. We also need to refresh our memories about the historical contingencies surrounding the emergence of the (western) monotheistic idea of “God” – an infinite supernatural Agent who has a special plan for a particular Group. In the second section, I briefly explain how the advent of this conception, which turned out to be logically, psychologically, and politically unbearable, contributed to the assemblage of the atheist machine during the axial age.

Next, I utilize the conceptual framework of theogonic reproduction theory as a heuristic model for clarifying the dynamics at work within and among the four main social-machines treated in the Capitalism and Schizophrenia project (i.e., the territorial, despotic, capitalist, and war machines). As we will see, the atheist machine plays a special role in the creative production of the (revolutionary) war machine. Finally, I will explore the implications of the integration of these machines, memories, and models for the productive task of becoming-atheist, that is, for the experimental construction of bodies without organs on the plane of immanence without any recourse to transcendent religious Figures imaginatively engaged by subjugated groups whose rituals allegedly mediate divine revelation.

Elsewhere I have spelled out the connections between theogonic reproduction theory and Deleuzian philosophy in more detail. In the current context, I limit myself to a broad outline of the theory, demonstrating its usefulness for abstracting a Deleuzian atheist machine, and extracting its revolutionary force for the schizoanalysis of religion.

**Atheism and Schizoanalysis**

The goal of schizoanalysis is “to analyze the specific nature of the libidinal investments in the economic and political spheres, and thereby to show how, in the subject who desires, desire can be made to desire its own repression ... All this happens, not in ideology, but well beneath it ...” One of the goals of theological schizoanalysis, I suggest, is to show how subjects come to desire their own religious repression. “All this” does indeed occur “well beneath” the

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5 Shults, *Iconoclastic Theology: Gilles Deleuze and the Secretion of Atheism*.