

## The Depersonalization of Proper Names

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This essay is concerned with critically examining the concept of the proper name as it is developed through the works of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, addressing this development, or rather trajectory, in particular texts from different periods. The thesis will be concerned in elucidating a Deleuzian perspective on the theory of the signature and the proper name, in close relation to the work on authorship by thinkers as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, commonly associated with the 1960s discourse of the 'death of the author'. This discourse generally hinges on the trope of the author's intention and its relevancy (or lack thereof). I will seek to examine the role of the proper name beyond the question of intentionality, and rather as a mediator in-between the physical person and its subjectivity, the author-function exercised by it, and the text or artwork where this function is manifest.

The philosophical position of Gilles Deleuze (and Felix Guattari) provides a platform to approach this question. On one hand Deleuze provides the theoretical tools to examine the construction of identity through the encounters of underlying flows. On the other hand Deleuze's own remarks apropos the proper name point to a theory based not on representation, but rather on 'effects.'

This paper will propose that, following Deleuze's analyses, the proper name conveys an act of depersonalization, opening up different multiplicities that pervade the named author, and are only actualized depending on the conditions of the reader.

In simplifying terms we could say that Deleuze's philosophy is partially concerned with flows and processes.<sup>1</sup> For Deleuze, the traditional categories of identity and the subject become secondary, in that they are seen as effects of pre-subjective flows.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his philosophical career, and in particular in his 1968 book *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze tries to move away from a conception of difference in terms of identities and representation, which can be put in dialectical relations of the One and the Many.<sup>3</sup>

Patton clarifies that Deleuze is not overthrowing the concepts of identity and unity; rather, 'he was concerned with the question of how identity is constituted and what forms it takes.'<sup>4</sup> Deleuze claims that the traditional philosophical image of thought presupposes a model of recognition, which is based on the notions of sameness and identity.<sup>5</sup> In rejecting this image of thought, Deleuze's project is

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<sup>1</sup> See Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia Press University, 1995), 145.

<sup>2</sup> See Daniel Smith, 'Patton: Normativity, Freedom and Judgment,' (2003) in *Essays on Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 342.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze's Way* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007), 124. See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 332.

<sup>4</sup> Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000), 29.

<sup>5</sup> See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 169.

concerned with the conditions for the formation of identity, and the possibilities of transformation. The concept of multiplicity is introduced "in order to escape the abstract opposition between the multiple and the one, to escape dialectics".<sup>6</sup> These concepts, according to Daniel Smith, serve to analyze social formations by unraveling 'the variable lines and singular *processes* that constitute it as a multiplicity,' including their connections and transformations.<sup>7</sup>

Within this position, it can be argued that the proper name does not point to a particular individual, author or subject. In effect, the proper name is detached from the author. It becomes a signifier for a particular concept or, using Deleuze's and Guattari's words, one or several multiplicities. In this sense, the proper name produces an act of depersonalization:

"The proper name (*nom propre*) does not designate an individual: it is on the contrary when the individual opens up to the multiplicities pervading him or her, at the outcome of the most severe operation of depersonalization."<sup>8</sup>

On first reading, this position seems to agree with Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault views on the demise of the authorial function, where the author's intention and identity do not play a central role in the interpretations of a text or artwork. In a sense, Deleuze and Guattari agree on the demise of the author's authority. Yet their relation to 'death of the author' discourse is more nuanced. Deleuze and Guattari, in their book *What is Philosophy?* seem to argue for a traditionalist view on the authority of the author's signature and intentionality: "[Concepts] must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator's signature."<sup>9</sup>

In my thesis I will seek to address this seemingly incompatible views, as entertained and exposed in several of Deleuze's (and Guattari's) writings: the centrality of the proper name or signature; and at the same time its detachment from an author or individual, its power of depersonalization and effacement of the individual.

My project will thus consist in examining the following key questions: How can Deleuze's position assist in both elucidating and problematizing what the role of the proper name is in our relationship to a body of work or a set of concepts, as readers and authors, and how authorial subjectivities are constructed by the use of proper names?

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<sup>6</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, 'Patton,' 346.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 5.

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