

Deleuze, Lucretius, and the Simulacrum of Naturalism

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La flèche du simulacra épicurien, filant droit jusqu'à nous,
fait naître, fait renaître, une "fantasmaphysique."

—Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum"

The practice of philosophy for Gilles Deleuze was deeply embedded in the history of philosophy. Early in his career, he published a monograph on Hume, which was followed, after nearly a decade, by a series of focused studies on Nietzsche, Kant, Bergson, and Spinoza, before his "own" philosophical masterpieces, *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*, appeared in the late 1960s. Deleuze's orientation toward the past owed much to his philosophical education—rigorous, and dominated by a canon of masters. Yet his approach was also studiously subversive. His decision to work on Hume at a time when his contemporaries were involved in the exegesis of the three H's (Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger) was the first step in his creation of a counter-canon in Western philosophy, loosely organized, at least initially, around a project that he called "reversing Platonism." His readings of those he elected to this

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anti-Platonic tradition are strategic, unexpected, and, above all, creative.¹ Deleuze himself, in a twist on the philosophical pregnancy described by Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*, famously described his work in the history of philosophy in generative terms:

Mais, surtout, ma manière de m'en tirer à cette époque, c'était, je crois bien, de concevoir l'histoire de la philosophie comme une sorte d'enculage ou, ce qui revient au même, d'immaculée conception. Je m'imaginai arriver dans le dos d'un auteur, et lui faire un enfant, qui serait le sien et qui serait pourtant monstrueux. Que ce soit bien le sien, c'est très important, parce qu'il fallait que l'auteur dise effectivement tout ce que je lui faisais dire. Mais que l'enfant soit monstrueux, c'était nécessaire aussi, parce qu'il fallait passer par toutes sortes de décentrement, glissements, cassements, émissions secrètes qui m'ont fait bien plaisir.²

I suppose the main way I coped with it at the time was to see the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed.³

Reception is, on this model, turned on its head: active, rather than passive, and unpredictably productive. The avowed fidelity to the text finds its complement in the slippages that ground the resemblance between the father and his "monstrous" child in difference and deviation. Deleuze's understanding of the history of philosophy as a field of dynamic genesis, together with his commitment to radicalizing philosophy's future through "untimely" interventions that incorporate readings of the past, makes him a promising resource for imagining how Epicureanism can become catalytic in the present.

Epicureanism was, in fact, one of the moments in the Western philosophical tradition that Deleuze returned to repeatedly over the course of

¹ On Deleuze as a historian of philosophy, see Hardt (1993), esp. xvii–xxi; Sellars (2007c); Tally (2010).

² Deleuze (1990b) 15.

³ Trans. Joughin in Deleuze (1995) 6.

his career. Indeed, among his earliest essays is an article on Lucretius, published as "Lucrèce et le naturalisme" in *Les études philosophiques* in 1961. He considered the essay important enough to republish, with modifications and further elaboration, as "Lucretius and the Simulacrum" ("Lucrèce et le simulacre") in an appendix to the *Logic of Sense* in 1969 on the subject of the simulacrum in ancient philosophy. It serves there as the companion piece to a revised version of a reading of Plato's *Sophist* that first appeared in 1967 as "Renverser le platonisme," retitled "Plato and the Simulacrum" ("Platon et le simulacre") in the appendix.

The significance of the essay on Lucretius, however, has often been overshadowed by Deleuze's reading of Plato, valued for the perspective that it affords on the larger project of *Difference and Repetition* (1968). The emphasis on Plato has colored, in turn, understandings of the ancient simulacrum. In view of Deleuze's representation of Platonism as committed to "repressing the simulacra, keeping them completely submerged" (*de refouler les simulacres, de les maintenir enchaînés tout au fond*), the ancient simulacrum has come to be seen as a primarily subversive phenomenon, one capable of upsetting the entire project of representation initiated by Platonism from within.⁴ Moreover, in the main body of the *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze treats the other great Hellenistic philosophical school, Stoicism, as the most important ancient challenge to Platonism and a strategic point of origin for his counter-canon.⁵

Nevertheless, Deleuze's essay on Lucretius makes large claims on behalf of Epicureanism and its famous Roman spokesman. For Deleuze, Epicurus, followed by Lucretius, is the first to identify naturalism as the object of philosophy, both in speculative and pragmatic terms, to the extent that he creates a philosophical system that embraces a cosmos of the diverse and fashions ethics as the practice of affirmation: it is with

⁴ Deleuze (1990a) 257 [(1969) 296]. See esp. D. W. Smith (2006) on Deleuze's reading of the Platonic simulacrum; Flaxman (2009) on his reading of Plato more generally. (Plato, of course, does not use the [Latin] word *simulacrum*, which is Deleuze's translation of the Greek word *phantasma*. Lucretius uses *simulacrum*, as well as *imago*, *effigies*, and *figura*, to translate Epicurus's *eidōlon*.)

⁵ See esp. the "Eighteenth Series of the Three Images of Philosophers" at Deleuze (1990a) 127–33 [(1969) 152–58] and the "Twentieth Series on the Moral Problem in Stoic Philosophy" at (1990a) 142–53 [(1969) 167–73]. On Deleuze and the Stoics, see the series of articles published by John Sellars ((1999); (2006); (2007a); (2007b)) and Bénatouil (2003), esp. 20–23. The Stoics briefly resurface at Deleuze and Parnet (1987) 62–66 [(1977) 77–81]) but they are largely in the background of Deleuze's later work.

the Epicureans that "the real noble acts of philosophical pluralism begin" (*commencent les vrais actes de noblesse du pluralisme en philosophie*).⁶ Moreover, in the years after the *Logic of Sense*, Lucretius reemerges at decisive points in Deleuze's work as a conceptual ally; his position at the head of a refashioned canon of empiricists was affirmed by Deleuze in interviews and essays throughout his life.⁷ Lucretius thus occupies a critical point of reference for Deleuze's conceptualization of philosophical pluralism and an ethics of affirmation. If he is a less prominent figure than thinkers like Spinoza or Nietzsche, he is nevertheless a figure who proved remarkably persistent and polyform within Deleuze's œuvre. By returning to the early essay on Lucretius, we can get a better sense of what Deleuze drew from him.

At the same time, Deleuze's essay participates in an important, albeit relatively unrecognized, development in the history of Lucretius's twentieth-century reception. It has become conventional wisdom, especially in the Anglophone mainstream, that, as the twentieth century wore on, people stopped reading the *De Rerum Natura* for its philosophical or scientific import, effectively delivering it into the hands of poets and philologists.⁸ Yet this account of the most recent phase of the poem's reception is misleadingly narrow. If we shift our attention to the rich tradition of French philosophy, and particularly the history and philosophy of science in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century France, a different picture of Lucretius's reception in the modern world emerges. Early in his career, for example, Henri Bergson undertook a translation of the *De Rerum Natura*, while ancient atomism serves as the primary vehicle

⁶ Deleuze (1990a) 267 [(1969) 308]). It is worth noting that Foucault, in his long laudatory review of *Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition*, makes Epicureanism and, more specifically, the "surface effects in which Epicureans take such pleasure," central to Deleuze's philosophical project in those two works ((1977) 169 [(1970) 888]). For more recent readings of Deleuze on Lucretius, see Berressem (2005); Goldberg (2009).

⁷ Lucretius is invoked as a thinker of flux, for example, at Deleuze and Guattari (1987) 361–62, 489–90 [(1980) 446–47, 610–11], where the *clinamen* becomes newly important to the dynamics of the "molecular" level. For Lucretius (or Epicurus) in a canon of empiricists, see, e.g., Deleuze and Parnet (1987) 14–15 [(1977) 21]; Deleuze (2003) 138 [(2002) 191–92]. See further below, n. 69.

⁸ This is the story told in Johnson (2000) 127–33 (although Johnson offers his own defense of Lucretius's relevance to science at 135–55). It is reprised in Gillespie and Mackenzie (2007), the twentieth-century coverage of Lucretius for the recent *Cambridge Companion*—although the authors do note the path-breaking Kennedy (2002)—and in reviews of that volume, e.g., Gowers (2008). Cf. Shearin (2009).

for tackling epistemological questions in science in Gaston Bachelard's *Les intuitions atomistiques*.⁹ Later in the century, the Epicurean *clinamen* became a potent, if multivalent, figure for a number of French philosophers, including Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, and Jacques Derrida.¹⁰ No doubt the most important intervention in this tradition has been Michel Serres' *The Birth of Physics*, a forceful defense of Lucretius's relevance to post-Newtonian physics that was first published in 1977.¹¹

Deleuze occupies a significant node in this network. His essay on Lucretius may have influenced Serres, as well as Lacan and Derrida, in their readings of the poem; it is Serres' Lucretius, in turn, who is heralded a decade later in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which Deleuze coauthored with Félix Guattari.¹² The essay in which Foucault memorably speculates that the twentieth century will one day be called "Deleuzian" positions Deleuze as the heir to nothing other than the Epicurean simulacrum.¹³ The tradition of naturalism that Deleuze first locates in Lucretius has recently been taken up as a promising avenue for developing the critical edge of ecological philosophy.¹⁴ From the vantage point of a Deleuzian Lucretius, the twentieth-century reception of the poem is not fated to serve as a cautionary tale about the entrenchment of "two cultures": the arts and the humanities, on the one hand, and the sciences, on the other. Rather, the *De Rerum Natura* becomes an important resource for reflecting on where physics and ethics intersect.

In this paper, I undertake a close reading of the essay on Lucretius as it appears in the *Logic of Sense*, tracking a Deleuzian-Epicurean-Lucretian naturalism as it emerges through Deleuze's own close reading of the poem.

⁹ See Bergson (1959), first published in French as Bergson (1884), and Bachelard (1933). The divergent approaches of Bergson and Bachelard to ancient atomism are explored by Power (2006). In the *Cambridge Companion*, Gillespie and Mackenzie do touch on both Bergson's translation and references to Lucretius in *Creative Evolution* ((2007) 308–309, 320–21) without mentioning other French philosophers and historians of science.

¹⁰ On Lacan and Derrida, see Lacan (1977) 63–64 and Derrida (1984), with Berressem (2005) 62–67; on Althusser, see Althusser (2006) 163–207, esp. 167–71. See also Goldberg (2009) 31–62, reviewing the impact of Lucretius and Epicureanism on twentieth-century French critical theory; Gigandet's essay in this volume considers the place of Epicureanism in Foucault's reading of ancient philosophy.

¹¹ Serres (2000), first published in French as Serres (1977). On Serres' interpretation of Lucretius, see Berressem (2005); Clucas (2005); Webb (2006).

¹² See Berressem (2005) 54–55.

¹³ Foucault (1977), first published in French as Foucault (1970).

¹⁴ Hayden (2008).

In the second half of the essay, I focus on the function of the Lucretian simulacrum, taking into consideration how it relates to the claims that Deleuze makes on behalf of the simulacrum in his reading of Plato.¹⁵ Do the films and effluences of objects that bathe our senses at every moment according to the Epicurean doctrine of perception contribute to the larger project of "reversing Platonism"? If Deleuze establishes the autonomy of the simulacrum in Plato in order to trouble a philosophical system founded on a hierarchy of models and copies, what is at stake for him in appropriating the Epicurean simulacrum?

Much like Deleuze's redeployed Platonic simulacrum, the simulacrum described by Lucretius arises from a field of teeming difference. Yet insofar as it cannot itself be seen, it raises questions about how we come to grasp the world of difference and flux in which it participates—the very task we must undertake if we are to affirm this world instead of allowing ourselves to be seduced by myths of Being and the false infinite. Despite the dangers of phantasms, Deleuze does not argue that they must be stripped away. Rather, the reading of Lucretius that he enacts can be seen as a simulation of nature *qua* object of affirmation and pleasure. The essay on Lucretius thus shows Deleuze experimenting with the question of how naturalism and readings of naturalism can be strategically deployed in the service of an ethics driven by the "practical critique of all mystifications" (*la critique pratique de toutes les mystifications*), an ethics that Deleuze continued to develop over the course of his life.¹⁶

THE PHYSICS OF DIFFERENCE

Lucretius's achievement, Deleuze observes at the outset of "Lucretius and the Simulacrum," is to have identified what he calls "naturalism" as the speculative and pragmatic object of philosophy. These registers correspond to the domains of physics and ethics, respectively. The relationship between them is governed by the Epicurean logic of analogy, on the one hand, and the logic of gradation, on the other, with the latter

¹⁵ Deleuze presumably wrote the Lucretius essay (first published in 1961) before the essay on Plato (first published in 1967), but much of the new material in the 1969 version of the Lucretius essay concerns the simulacrum.

¹⁶ Deleuze (1990a) 279 [(1969) 324].

allowing, crucially, passage from one register to the other. By descending into the depths of physics, we discover that the phantasms and images that play across the surface are objects of pleasure rather than catalysts of disturbance and anxiety. Indeed, the practice of going beyond—or “decomposing,” to adopt Deleuze’s own language—the images that lead us astray in order to understand the conditions of their formation in difference and turbulence occupies a significant place in the didactic-ethical plot of Lucretius’s poem. It is also central to Deleuze’s own strategic articulation of naturalism’s project.

Foremost among the mental obsessions that give rise to false philosophy is belief in the One or the Whole or Being, a trap into which many of the early Greek philosophers, on Epicurus’s own assessment, fell. Against the myth of the One and the fears it generates about corruptibility and the encroachment of non-Being on Being, Deleuze places the Epicurean commitment to the diversity of the natural world, expressed at the level of the species, the individual, and the parts of a compound body; that diversity is also the basis for the deduction of the diversity of worlds.¹⁷ The constitutive diversity of nature means that it cannot be understood as a totality—that is, a collection of bodies subject to a final and complete reckoning. It is, rather, a distribution: things exist, Deleuze writes, “one by one” (*une à une*) and not all at once; “nature is not attributive, but rather conjunctive” (*La Nature n’est pas collective, mais distributive*).¹⁸ In place of identity and contradiction, Epicureanism substitutes resemblances and differences, compositions and decompositions. Everything is generated—and here Deleuze is quoting from the first book of the *De Rerum Natura* (1.633–34)—“out of connections, densities, shocks, encounters, concurrences, and motions” (*des connexions, des densités, des chocs, des rencontres, des mouvements*).¹⁹

Even a short précis gives a sense of the axiom at the heart of Deleuze’s reading of Epicureanism: nature is power. The question becomes, then, *how* nature generates diversity and, eventually, *how*, out of diversity, resemblance develops. For the Epicurean line is not simply that the principle of the diverse is itself diverse, a demand that Deleuze sensibly

¹⁷ Deleuze (1990a) 266 [(1969) 307–308]. On the critique of Being in Deleuze more generally, see D. W. Smith (2006) 108–11.

¹⁸ Deleuze (1990a) 267 [(1969) 308–309].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 268 [(1969) 309].

dismisses as circular. Rather, naturalism outlines a structured principle of causality that engineers the production of the diverse. Such a principle works *inside* the various compositions and combinations that populate the cosmos. As a result, diversity emerges within a world that is also characterized by pattern and resemblance.²⁰

One of the most important ways in which power operates is through the collision of atoms in the void. Such collisions are made possible by the *clinamen* or swerve, in the absence of which there would be nothing but a steady rain of sameness, what Michel Serres calls “laminar flow.” From antiquity to the present, the *clinamen* has been read as one of the most tantalizing and yet problematic aspects of Epicureanism. For it seems to carve out a space exempt from physical determinism that has conventionally been allocated either to chance or to free will (the difficulty of conflating the two—why would a random swerve produce agency?—is often used to discount the theory). Deleuze acknowledges the line of interpretation that stresses contingency only to reject it, implicating the *clinamen* instead in a different kind of undecideability. The *clinamen* is not a secondary movement that supervenes on the behavior of the atom in order to divert it from its course: there is nothing accidental about it. Rather, it operates within the atom as its “original determination of the direction of [its] movement” (*la détermination originelle de la direction du mouvement de l’atome*), the differential within matter that ensures the atom’s contact with other atoms, enabling the emergence of the diverse array of composite beings that populate the perceptible world.²¹

The swerve occurs, crucially for Deleuze, below the threshold of a moment of continuous time—that is, the smallest amount of time that an atom travels in a unique direction before being diverted through a collision. It happens, then, in a time that is “unassignable” (*inassignable*), Deleuze’s translation of *incertus* in Lucretius’s phrase *incerto tempore . . . incertisque locis* (“at an unassignable time and in unassignable places,” 2.218–19). (It is worth noting that Deleuze drops Lucretius’s reference to *loci*, focusing on the *clinamen* as it belongs to time, a decision symptomatic of his emphasis throughout the essay on the different temporalities created by the different speeds of things and the ethical fallout of

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 268 [(1969) 310].

²¹ *Ibid.*, 269 [(1969) 311].

these differences.) The impossible-to-grasp time of the *clinamen* represents what Deleuze calls the *lex atomi*, the “irreducible plurality of causes or of causal series, and the impossibility of bringing causes together into a whole” (*la pluralité irréductible des causes ou des séries causales, l'impossibilité de réunir les causes en un tout*).²² The causes, in other words, cannot be totalized. It is precisely by insisting on the independence of each causal series—rather than, as in the Stoics, the total unity of causes—that the Epicureans believe they escape the nets of determinism.

Before taking a closer look at the relationship of the *clinamen* to thresholds of time, it is worth stressing that the “unassignable” nature of the *clinamen* does not give rise to chancy, unpredictable, chaotic worlds. Rather, it contributes to the formation of worlds articulated by certain laws. There are limits, first, to the atom itself. The atom cannot be so large, for example, that it crosses a threshold beyond which it becomes sensible; such a requirement generates, in turn, limits on the shape of the atom, insofar as an infinite diversity of shapes would eventually result in the atom becoming sensible.²³ Moreover, atoms are limited by their shapes to certain kinds of combinations, a law that forecloses the possibility of a single infinite combination of atoms while prohibiting, too, the viability of each and every contingent combination.²⁴ The combinations that succeed in cohering with some stability are identified in Epicureanism as specific seeds or sperms, which serve as the building blocks of compound bodies. The seed, insofar as it underwrites predictability within classes of compounds, plays an important role in guaranteeing what Lucretius calls the “laws of nature” (*foedera naturae*), which Deleuze opposes to the “laws of fate” (*foedera fati*).

Lucretius's own interest in offering an atomist explanation for the regularities in nature responds not only to his desire to make the theory fit with what we can observe through the senses but also to the ethical

²² Ibid., 270 [(1969) 312].

²³ The theoretical limit on the size of the atom was introduced by Epicurus (*Letter to Herodotus* 42, 55).

²⁴ The viability of compounds is renegotiated at the level of animals during the early phases of species production, to the extent that only those animals capable of feeding themselves and reproducing survive past the first phase of spontaneous generation: see *De Rerum Natura* 5.837–924, where Lucretius offers a long excursus on the laws of nature (*foedera naturae*).

significance of natural laws.²⁵ It is just such laws, after all, that Epicureanism holds up in order to destabilize the belief in wanton displays of the gods' power and the fears that such a belief generates.²⁶

Deleuze's interest in regularity appears, at first glance, to lie elsewhere. That is to say, he seems less concerned with ethics and more concerned with how regularity and especially resemblance emerge out of the nature of the diverse and the true infinite, in keeping with his commitment to explicating Epicureanism as a philosophy of Nature fundamentally opposed to the One or the Whole. In his reading, he stresses that the very identity of a compound body in Epicureanism is guaranteed not simply by the nature of a seed but also by the resources available to the ongoing renewal of the compound. These resources are defined first and foremost by their infinite plenitude: whereas the shape of the atom is limited, there is an unlimited number of atoms of a particular shape. The infinite bank of seeds guarantees that a compound body, while finite relative to the atom, endures and resembles itself over time. For at every moment, the compound is losing elements and gaining new ones of the same shape. The infinite number of atoms, besides making it probable that any compound body or world will easily find elements to replace those lost, ensures, too, the probability that such a compound—and compounds similar to it—will take shape in the first place.²⁷ At the same time, certain worlds are by their own composition particularly hospitable to certain compounds. What this means is that as the body loses its constituent elements, the milieu, like “a mother

²⁵ For references to limits in Lucretius and Epicureanism, see De Lacy (1969), esp. 106–107.

²⁶ See esp. *De Rerum Natura* 1.146–214.

²⁷ “The production of any composite entity presupposes that the different elements capable of forming it be themselves infinite in number. They would have no chance of coming together, if each of them, in the void, were the only member of its kind or limited in number. But since each one of them has an infinite number of similar elements, they do not produce a composite entity, without their equivalents having the same chance of renewing their parts, and even of reproducing a similar complex entity” ((1990a) 271) (*C'est que la production d'un composé quelconque suppose que les différents éléments capables de le former soient eux-mêmes en nombre infini; ils n'auraient aucune chance de se rencontrer si chacun d'eux, dans le vide, était seul de son espèce ou limité en nombre. Mais, puisque chacun d'eux a une infinité de pareils, ils ne produisent pas un composé sans que leurs pareils n'aient la même chance d'en renouveler les parties et même de reproduire un composé semblable*, (1969) 313–14). In Deleuze's exposition here we see the kernel of Nietzsche's eternal return, which would become central to his thinking.

suites for [that body's] reproduction" (*une mère apte à le reproduire*), readily supplies new ones. Deleuze's reading of Lucretius's Epicurean physics thus insists on both diversity *and* resemblance; flux *and* identity; infinity *and* finitude: nature is not random but a machine of sorts for producing and *re*-producing difference.²⁸

Where do ethics belong in all this? As it turns out, Deleuze's reading of Epicurean physics, far from losing sight of the ethical thrust of Lucretius's poem, lays the groundwork for his interpretation of Epicurean ethics. For it is the task of grasping *how* resemblance emerges from difference and distinguishing what really is infinite from what only seems infinite that, for Deleuze, constitutes the central labor of Epicurean ethics. What are the conditions of possibility for such labor?

It is worth backing up here to Deleuze's most significant observation about the pivot of Epicureanism—namely, the atom itself. The atom, in Deleuze's definition, is "that which must be thought, and that which can only be thought . . . the absolute reality of what is perceived" (*ce qui doit être pensé, ce qui ne peut être que pensé . . . la réalité absolue de ce qui est perçu*).²⁹ The atom, in other words, cannot be understood apart from its status as an object of thought; thought, in turn, is not a way of looking at the real but is, rather, part of the real itself and its nature. Indeed, whereas Lucretius sometimes seems to relate the invisibility of the atom to the limitations of our vision, casting thought as the necessary supplement to our (flawed) senses,³⁰ Deleuze is adamant that the atom is essentially hidden on account of its own nature "and not the imperfection of our sensibility" (*et non de l'imperfection de notre sensibilité*).³¹ Therefore, what can be seen and what can be thought, as well as what cannot be seen and what cannot be thought, are ontological categories, segmentations of the atomists' cosmos. Even more than the dualism of body and void, the cuts and thresholds that these categories create structure the Epicurean worldview on Deleuze's reading in a manner not unlike the

²⁸ See also Berressem (2005). For Berressem, what makes the Lucretius essay so crucial is that it first proposes a "nonlinear and dynamic philosophy," that is, "a 'chaosmos *avant la lettre* [sic]" (54). But Berressem does not sufficiently stress the relationship between limits and dynamism in Deleuze's reading.

²⁹ Deleuze (1990a) 268 [(1969) 310].

³⁰ E.g., *De Rerum Natura* 1.320–28 (referring to imperceptible changes at or near the atomic level rather than to the atom itself).

³¹ Deleuze (1990a) 268 [(1969) 310].

division of what exists into corporeals and incorporeals within Stoicism (a division that is deeply significant in the *Logic of Sense*).³² They emphasize discontinuities—creases or folds—within the real itself.

The beauty of the Epicurean method is to have developed strategies for passing between these domains according to the principle of analogy, on the one hand, and gradation, on the other. The principle of analogy lines up what is sensible, its sensible parts, and the minimum of what can be sensed with what can be thought, the parts that can be thought (i.e., the parts of the atom), and the minimum of what can be thought.³³ The minima act as thresholds that establish the domain of what cannot be grasped by the senses and by thought, respectively. The limits they set concern not only matter but also time, as we saw in relationship to the *clinamen*. The principle of analogy facilitates the second aspect of the Epicurean method, the principle of gradation. It is through this second principle that one passes between the different domains established by analogy, from the image of a compound object all the way down to the *clinamen*: "we go from the noetic to the sensible analogue, and conversely, through a series of steps conceived and established according to a process of exhaustion" (*on passe de l'analogue noétique à l'analogue sensible, et inversement, par une série de degrés conçus et établis d'après un procédé d'exhaustion*).³⁴

The Epicurean method reaches its limits with the minimum of thinkable matter and, especially, thinkable time. Beyond such limits we are in the domain of the *clinamen*: recall that the differential embedded in every atom, by definition, lies beyond the limits of thought altogether. If we wish to preserve the ontological status of what can and cannot be thought, we must understand the statement that such a differential lies beyond the limits of thought to mean not simply that *we* fail to grasp the differential but that the differential participates in an irreducible plurality of causes. It follows that causes—and Nature more generally—cannot be totalized. This is why the *clinamen* is said to happen at a time that is "unassignable" (*inassignable*).³⁵

³² On Deleuze's reading of Stoic incorporeals, see Sellars (2007a) 178–79 n. 4, 204 n. 63.

³³ The schematism is emphasized in the diagram Deleuze offers of the analogy in the first published version of the article on Lucretius: see Deleuze (1961) 21.

³⁴ Deleuze (1990a) 268 [(1969) 310]. This sentence was added to the 1969 version of the essay.

³⁵ Deleuze (1990a) 270 [(1969) 312].

Nevertheless, the fact that the *clinamen* lies beyond the reach of thought is not simply an ontological truth. Such a state of affairs has powerful ethical implications, too, insofar as it discredits the belief in the One or the Whole. These ethical implications are unleashed when we move down the scale from sensible to noetic and beyond, passing to the limit. By undertaking this passage, then, we succeed in dissipating the One and the Whole as "obsessions of the mind, speculative forms of belief in the *fatum*, and the theological forms of a false philosophy" (*les manies de l'esprit, les formes spéculatives de la croyance au fatum, les formes théologiques d'une fausse philosophie*).³⁶ The movement along the scale is an act of thought, where thought is understood not as a domain somehow analogous to sensing, but as the *means* of establishing the limits of different domains. It fulfills, as such, the function of discrimination that we saw is fundamental to Deleuze's interpretation of the Epicurean ethical project. The act of thinking becomes critical in the Greek sense of *krisis*: thought performs a separation, a cut.

Such acts of discrimination do not just entail moving between different strata of the real. They lead, ultimately, to the core labor of Epicurean ethics, that is, the elimination of false beliefs, as Deleuze's mention of "obsessions of the mind" indicates. The work of dissipating such phantoms becomes clearer if we shift our attention to what falls below the threshold of sensible time—namely, the simulacrum.

The simulacrum is introduced by Deleuze rather abruptly to make sense of the most pernicious illusions targeted by Epicurean ethics: the illusion of infinite pleasure and the illusion of infinite punishment (related to the belief in the infinite duration of the body and the soul, respectively). Together these illusions create a suffocating, double fear: "the fear of dying when we are not yet dead, and also . . . the fear of not yet being dead once we already are" (*la peur de mourir quand nous ne sommes pas encore morts, mais aussi . . . la peur de ne pas être encore mort une fois que nous le serons déjà*).³⁷ Grasping the nature of the simulacrum becomes crucial to eliminating these illusions. What does it mean to conceptualize the simulacrum under these conditions? What is the

³⁶ Ibid., 267 [(1969) 309].

³⁷ Deleuze (1990a) 273 [(1969) 316]. On both illusions, Deleuze cites *De Rerum Natura* 1.110–19; 3.41–73, 978–1023; 6.12–19. On the illusion of infinite pleasure, see also 2.500–506 and the speech of Nature at 3.931–49.

status of its subversive potential? What is its place in a philosophy of affirmation?

THE LUCRETIAN SIMULACRUM

The simulacrum is the pillar of Lucretius's theory of perception and illusion in the fourth book of the *De Rerum Natura*. He argues there that compound bodies are continuously producing a stream of ephemeral, invisible emanations that he calls simulacra. These emanations, intercepted by our sensory organs, produce smell or hearing or vision, depending on the nature of the simulacrum. They are not perceived in and of themselves, being too fine, but are, rather, compressed together with other identical—or nearly identical—simulacra. The resulting aggregate conveys the nature of the object to the senses. The simulacrum thus facilitates a kind of touch—the unmediated sense par excellence—between the sensory organ and a sensible object in situations where the object in question remains at a distance from the percipient.

The natural terrain of the simulacrum is thus best seen as a space-between, and not only insofar as simulacra travel between compound bodies (*entre les surfaces*, as Foucault says in his *Critique* review). They also hover between the world of atoms and the world of bodies.³⁸ Deleuze stresses the shared ground of the atom and the simulacrum by pointing out that Epicurus describes them both as moving "as swiftly as thought."³⁹ But the simulacrum belongs to thought only because it falls below the threshold of the minimum sensible. It is defined not as an object proper to thought but as something that eludes the sensible.

The mediate and mediating position of the simulacrum means that it is no easy task to grasp its nature. To do so requires the mind to negotiate not just the relationship between identity and difference or between stability and flux but also the relationship between surface appearances and events that happen in the depths. The simulacrum is, on the one hand, generated by a compound body *qua* stable configuration of qualities that communicate "the atomic disposition without which it

³⁸ Foucault (1977) 169 [(1970) 888].

³⁹ Deleuze (1990a) 274 [(1969) 317].

would cease to be what it is" (*la disposition atomique sans laquelle il cesse d'être ce qu'il est*).⁴⁰ In fact, it is the very persistence of identity that guarantees the steady stream of simulacra responsible for producing the image, thereby enabling the body's representation to the senses as a discrete object. On the other hand, the simulacrum's relationship to the object is not that of a copy to its model. Indeed, like the simulacrum in Deleuze's reading of Plato's *Sophist*, it challenges the very notion of descent through the Idea and internal resemblance.⁴¹ The Lucretian simulacrum is born, rather, out of the atomic quivering of the object; the emission of simulacra—that is, the body's continual reproduction of itself *qua* representation—is an expenditure of matter that necessitates a renewal of atoms from the infinite bank.⁴² The simulacrum is not a degraded copy of a more robust model or an Idea, then, but a symptom of the constant re-production of the "model." The different types of simulacra, moreover, confuse distinctions between a body's surface and its depths: the simulacra of the surface are illuminated by light from the depths; emissions from the body's depths are transformed by passing through the surface.⁴³

But perhaps the most significant feature of the simulacrum and its Janus-faced nature for Deleuze is its relationship to time and, more specifically, its remarkable speed. The swiftness of the simulacrum cannot be understood apart from the sometimes vast distances that it travels in bridging the object and the percipient. The simulacrum's transit through space contributes, from one perspective, to its transformation and deformation. If a stream of simulacra undergoes these changes collectively, the image itself is affected, as when a square tower appears round to the percipient standing at a distance, an appearance that results from the edges of the simulacra being worn down by their journey.⁴⁴ But we can also imagine an internal heterogeneity to the image,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 277 [(1969) 320–21].

⁴¹ See esp. Deleuze (1990a) 256–58 [(1969) 295–98].

⁴² See Downing (2006), likening the image captured by the camera to a Lucretian simulacrum: "it is . . . not a representation in any traditional sense (or in any Platonic sense of remove), but only in the sense in which the object itself is a representation, existing only insofar as it continuously represents itself in the form of continuously projected images" (24). See also Foucault (1977) 169–70 [(1970) 888]; D. W. Smith (2006) 108.

⁴³ Deleuze (1990a) 273–74 [(1969) 316–17].

⁴⁴ *De Rerum Natura* 4.353–63.

generated out of the particularity of each simulacrum's journey. Such heterogeneity seems inherent in the very language Lucretius uses to describe the simulacrum, as when he likens it to a particle of light or heat:

Principio persaepe levis res atque minutis
 corporibus factas celeris licet esse videre.
 In quo iam genere est solis lux et vapor eius,
 propterea quia sunt e primis facta minutis
 quae quasi cuduntur perque aeris intervallum
 non dubitant transire sequenti concita plaga;
 suppeditatur enim confestim lumine lumen,
 et quasi protelo stimulat fulgere fulgur.
 Quapropter simulacra pari ratione necesse est
 inmemorable per spatium transcurrere posse
 temporis in puncto, primum quod parvola causa
 est procul a tergo quae provehat atque propellat,
 quod superest, ubi tam volucris levitate ferantur. . . .
 (*De Rerum Natura* 4.183–95)

In the first place you may very often see that things light and made of minute elements are rapid. An example of these is the sun's light and his heat, because they are made of minute elements, which are as it were beaten with knocks, and do not hesitate to pass through the intervening air when struck by the blow of that which follows: for instantly light comes up behind light, and flash is pricked on by flash, as if in a long team [of oxen]. Therefore the simulacra in like manner must be able to run through space inexpressible by words in a moment of time, first because there is a very small impulse far behind which carries them on and pushes them on, also because they move with so swift a lightness. . . . (trans. Rouse-Smith)

Consulting the original Latin phrases "light comes up behind light" (*suppeditatur . . . lumine lumen*) and "flash is pricked on by flash" (*stimulat fulgere fulgur*), we see that the nouns *lumen* ("light") and *fulgur* ("flash") are not only doubled by the verb but also undergo a change of case—and hence, a change of letters (that is, literally, atoms)—as they deviate from the nominative, that is, the *naming*, form. The poem thus enacts the declension of the simulacrum as it is propelled through the air as part of a series of effluences. Lucretius's Latin seems to anticipate Deleuze's rejection of a "naked" model of repetition—the simple repetition of the

Same—in favor of a form of repetition that incorporates perversion, deviation, and displacement.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, for all the accidents of origin and transit, “always, the property of being related to an object subsists” (*toujours subsiste la propriété d’être rapporté à un objet*) in the simulacrum.⁴⁶ The minor deviations that we can imagine the individual simulacrum undergoes are not perceived by us. They are, rather, submerged into the single aggregate image. Moreover, given that the simulacrum moves too quickly to be registered within the minimum of continuous sensible time, its aleatory journey between surfaces is swallowed up by the moment it takes the image to arrive. As Lucretius asks, speaking of the reflection of stars in a body of water, “do you not see how, in an instant, the image falls from the borders of heaven to the borders of earth?” (*iamne vides igitur quam puncto tempore imago / aetheris ex oris in terrarum accidat oras?*)⁴⁷ All of this is to say that when we see, we are not seeing the simulacrum. We are seeing, rather, *because* of the simulacrum or, to be even more precise, because of the rapid succession of many simulacra, which together produce an effect: the image. The image is not, of course, an image of the simulacrum itself, nor does it communicate the object as a cluster of atoms in flux. It is the nature of the image, rather, to conceal the mechanisms of its own production, as well as the instability of the object to which it belongs—in short, to mask the teeming atomic world in which everything comes into being out of “connections, densities, shocks, encounters, concurrences, and motions.” If the simulacrum fully participates in a world between surfaces, its nature leads it to occlude the dynamics of that world.

In “Plato and the Simulacrum,” Deleuze casts the simulacrum as the subversive imposter, the sophist whose resemblance to the original is founded on difference, rather than being properly noetic, spiritual, and internal. If the aim of Platonism is to track down the simulacrum and drive it from the domain of representation, the Deleuzian counterinsurgency undertakes the simulacrum’s liberation, allowing it to rise to the surface (*monter à la surface*) and exercise its rights among icons and

⁴⁵ On a “naked” model of repetition, see D. W. Smith (2006) 111–12.

⁴⁶ Deleuze (1990a) 274 [(1969) 317].

⁴⁷ *De Rerum Natura* 4.214–15; see also 4.199–202.

copies.⁴⁸ In erupting on the scene of representation, the simulacrum destabilizes the very ground of representation, forcing the disclosure of a world in which every cave reveals yet another cave, “the intractability of masks and the impassibility of signs” (*l’inaltérabilité des masques, l’impassibilité des signes*).⁴⁹

Is there an echo of Plato in Deleuze’s reading of Lucretius or vice-versa? The simulacrum of Lucretius belongs, of course, to a quite different system. The very coupling of the Platonic “simulacrum” and the Lucretian simulacrum is Deleuze’s own ingenious juxtaposition of concepts that do not seem, at first glance, to be closely related, a juxtaposition informed by a twentieth-century French fascination with the simulacrum that was catalyzed in part by the work of Pierre Klossowski.⁵⁰ For one thing, in Plato the “simulacrum” (*phantasma*) exists among other images and representations, as opposed to making the image possible, as in Lucretius. Its coordinates are, naturally, Platonic, rather than Epicurean, with the result that it is implicated in a set of problems specific to Platonism (e.g., the Idea and its copies, as opposed to nested times). Finally, the “simulacrum” in Plato bears an unambiguous relationship to the false that Deleuze seizes upon as a point of reversal or, rather subversion. The relationship between the simulacrum and illusion is, however, more complicated in Lucretius, complicating, in turn, Deleuze’s appropriation of the Lucretian simulacrum.

Yet certain aspects of the simulacrum persist across Deleuze’s readings of Plato and Lucretius: its challenge to a system based on models and copies; its production of resemblance as an effect; its emergence from a field that is characterized in the Plato essay as involving “huge dimensions, depths, and distances that the observer cannot master” (*de grandes dimensions, des profondeurs et des distances que l’observateur ne peut pas dominer*), with that failure of mastery an integral part of the impression of resemblance, much as is the case for the Epicurean simulacrum.⁵¹ Do these resonances suggest that the task in the Lucretius essay is to bring the simulacrum to the surface, as it is in the Plato

⁴⁸ See Deleuze (1990a) 261–62 [(1969) 301–302].

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 264 [(1969) 305].

⁵⁰ See D. W. Smith (2006) 89–90. Deleuze (1990a) 280–300 [(1969) 325–50] is a reading of Klossowski’s simulacrum.

⁵¹ Deleuze (1990a) 258 [(1969) 298].

essay? How is this task transformed by being situated within a philosophy of affirmation, rather than enacting the dismantling of a philosophy of illusions of Being from within?

What makes the simulacrum in Deleuze's reading of Lucretius so intriguing is its ambiguous relationship to illusion and delusion and, more specifically, the fact that it is complicit with illusions that are, as much for Deleuze as for Epicurus, subversive of philosophy's proper end: pleasure. We have seen how the simulacrum, in slipping below the threshold of sensible matter and sensible time, conceals the conditions under which resemblance is produced out of diversity and flux, with the unhappy result that we mistake the stability of the image for the reality of the object. The potentially negative ethical implications of the simulacrum are most acute, however, if we turn to a third class of simulacra (in addition to simulacra of the surface and those of the depths)—namely, phantasms that exist virtually independent of any real object. The danger of these phantasms is that they command and feed psychic attachments that are deeply problematic.

The psychic hold exercised by such phantasms is suggested by their classification into three types: theological, oneiric, and erotic. They arise in various ways. Some are generated of their own accord out of air, rather than issuing from objects; they produce the impression of faces of giants and mountains in the sky.⁵² Others are too fine to be perceived by the eyes. These phantasms, becoming entangled upon colliding mid-air, strike the mind (*animus*) directly, creating the illusion of Centaurs and Scyllas and the three-headed dog Cerberus.⁵³ It is in the context of these last images that Deleuze introduces the very Epicurean problem of desire. Desire invests the fact that we are constantly bathed in and battered

⁵² *De Rerum Natura* 4.129–42.

⁵³ *De Rerum Natura* 4.722–48. Deleuze's account of these two classes ("theological" and "oneiric") draws on different aspects of Lucretius's discussion. Deleuze explains cloud-images in terms of existing simulacra that intersect in the air and discusses dream images that seem to dance and speak (see 4.788–801) in the class of theological (rather than oneiric) simulacra. Deleuze compares Lucretius's account of the origins of religious belief to that offered by Hume ((1990a) 275–76 [(1969) 319]), acknowledging Hume's widely known debt to Lucretius in the domain of theology but also perhaps suggesting a relationship between the Lucretius essay and his book on Hume (Deleuze (1953)), where he studies Hume's analysis of the intersection between the raw data of perception and the organizing forces of the human mind. On Deleuze's reading of Hume, see Bell (2009) and Boundas's introduction to Deleuze (1991).

by emanations with new meaning. For if objects are continuously shedding effluences and if we are, as a result, always immersed in these emanations, seeing becomes a motivated act, rather than a passive experience: we see what we pay attention to, neglecting some simulacra to focus on others. The force of attention is even stronger in the realm of imagination, where the effluences available to the mind are virtually limitless. And it is strongest when it comes to erotic simulacra, which generate images that sustain an impossible-to-satisfy desire.⁵⁴ These illusions capture us through our own fears and desires: the more we are governed by the hope of infinite pleasure and the fear of eternal punishment, the more we focus on those phantasms that confirm and strengthen our expectations. Yet these phantasms can only arise because of the nature of simulacra, which, Deleuze concludes, "*produce the mirage of a false infinite in the images which they form*" (*produisent le mirage d'un faux infini dans les images qu'ils forment*).⁵⁵ It is because the simulacrum is invisible that we pursue the illusions of infinite pleasure and infinite punishment, embracing the false infinite and all the myths it entails.

Given these conditions, it is hard to believe that the simulacrum functions as an instrument of "demystification" in the service of the overarching aims of naturalism. Indeed, one critic has recently voiced the suspicion that, in tracing the mirage of the false infinite to the simulacrum, Deleuze "allows Plato back in, blaming the simulacra as a false version of the sensible," as if the simulacrum's capacity for subversion loses its appeal when what is at stake is a philosophy that Deleuze wishes to endorse.⁵⁶

But the situation is not so straightforward. In the closing section of the essay, Deleuze circles back to naturalism's contributions to philosophical pluralism while shifting into a hortatory mode. What naturalism offers, he argues, is an ethical strategy that prevents the illusions that sustain bitterness and torment "by means of the rigorous distinction of the true infinite and the correct appreciation of times nested one within

⁵⁴ Deleuze (1990a) 276 [(1969) 319–20].

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 277 [(1969) 321], emphasis in original.

⁵⁶ Goldberg (2009) 38. Goldberg thus concludes that Deleuze understands Lucretius as rejecting the phantasm. But Deleuze does not reject the phantasm, nor does he see Lucretius as rejecting it, as I argue above.

the other, and of the passages to the limit which they imply" (*par la distinction rigoureuse du véritable infini et la juste appréciation des temps emboîtés les uns dans les autres, avec les passages à la limite qu'ils impliquent*).⁵⁷ Such a strategy mobilizes critical thought in order to appropriate it for the project of demystification. What role does the simulacrum play here?

Earlier we saw how critical thought is able to demarcate the various levels that structure Epicurean views of the real and to navigate between them. The Epicurean method uses the critical capacities of thought to compose and decompose the image, moving from the thinkable to the sensible and back. By dismantling the image, thought discloses the vertiginous field of difference, the "profound subsoil," out of which the image—and indeed, every compound body, every world—is generated and, hence, the genuine machine-like workings of resemblance and identity (i.e., the "highly-structured principle of causality" discussed earlier).⁵⁸ This profound subsoil is the terrain of the simulacrum. We can thus understand the process of disclosing this underworld as a specifically Epicurean strategy for bringing the simulacrum to the surface. Such a strategy does not so much liberate the simulacrum from the nether regions of Platonism but, rather, frees it from the space-time below the threshold of sensing. For it is precisely because the simulacrum is too rapid and too ephemeral to be captured by the senses that it gives rise to myths and indeed to the most disturbing myths of infinite pleasure and infinite pain. The surfacing of the simulacrum in thought can be seen, accordingly, as integral to Epicurean methods for breaking the myth's hold over us.

These are not, however, exactly the terms in which Deleuze himself expresses the demystification promised by naturalism. The last pages of the essay describe the philosophical project ushered in by Epicurus and Lucretius in terms of a denunciation of "everything that is sadness, everything that is the cause of sadness, and everything that needs sadness to exercise its power" (*tout ce qui est tristesse, tout ce qui est cause de*

⁵⁷ Deleuze (1990a) 277–78 [(1969) 322]. The exhortation is absent from the earlier version of "Lucretius et le naturalisme," which begins its closing movement, following the discussion of the simulacra (itself expanded in the 1969 version), thus: "Le faux infini est principe du trouble de l'âme" ((1961) 27; cf. (1969) 322).

⁵⁸ On the phrase "profound subsoil," see Deleuze (1990a) 263 [(1969) 304], citing from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* (§289).

tristesse, tout ce qui a besoin de la tristesse pour exercer son pouvoir)—in short, the false infinite—and a celebration of nature as a source of joy and value.⁵⁹ Deleuze frames the accomplishment of naturalism, then, as the transformation of thought and sensibility into affirmation and the refusal to allow the negative to speak in the name of philosophy.

Yet, how are these denunciations and affirmations effected, if not through a process of discrimination? For it is discrimination that traces the proper cuts in reality, allowing us to apprehend not only the sensible and what falls below it but also what can be thought and what falls below the threshold of thought. In fact, by decomposing the image, we are led to what looks like a change of sensibility.

Alors les phantasmes eux-mêmes deviennent des objets de plaisir, y compris dans l'effet qu'ils produisent et qui apparaît enfin tel qu'il est: un effet de vitesse et de légèreté, qu'on rattache à l'interférence extérieure d'objets très divers, comme un condensé de successions et de simultanéités.⁶⁰

Phantasms then become objects of pleasure, even in the effect which they produce, and which finally appears such as it is: an effect of swiftness or lightness which is attached to the external interference of very diverse objects—as a condensation of successions and simultaneities.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Deleuze (1990a) 279 [(1969) 323]. Such an affirmation for Deleuze requires bracketing the tragic account of the plague with which the *De Rerum Natura* closes: see Deleuze (1990a) 363–64 n.30 [(1969) 323]; see also Deleuze and Parnet (1987) 15 [(1977) 22]. Goldberg critiques what he sees as Deleuze's failure to admit death as a refusal to recognize the Epicurean distinction between the infinity of, say, an atom and the infinity of an individual life ((2009) 39–40). Yet is this what Deleuze resists at this moment? At no point does he deny Lucretius's central claim that our lives are finite; indeed, he embraces it. What he seems to resist, rather, for better or for worse, is the image of torment with which the poem closes, preferring to privilege in his own reading the image of the serene Epicurean who has come to affirm the true infinite.

⁶⁰ Deleuze (1969) 322.

⁶¹ Trans. Lester in Deleuze (1990a) 278. See also Foucault (1977) 171, who sees in this passage the role of Epicureanism in opening up "a metaphysics freed from its original profundity as well as from a supreme being, but also one that can conceive of the phantasm in its play of surfaces without the aid of models, a metaphysics where it is no longer a question of the One Good, but of the absence of God and the epidermic play of perversity" (. . . *une métaphysique affranchie de la profondeur originaire comme de l'étant suprême, mais capable de penser le fantôme hors de tout modèle et dans le jeu des surfaces; une métaphysique où il n'est plus question de l'Un-Bon, mais de l'absence de Dieu, et des jeux épidermiques de la perversité*, (1970) 889).

Deleuze's claim here is challenging. What does it mean, after all, for an effect to appear "just as it is" (*tel qu'il est*)? It is axiomatic in Epicureanism that the senses never lie. But that is not to say that things appear just as they are (the round tower is not really round, although Epicurus infamously pronounced the sun to be the size it appears to us): to perception we must add reason. Deleuze seems to suggest something similar, insofar as naturalism leads us to grasp the mechanics behind the effect of the phantasm. But he perhaps goes even further in suggesting that naturalism leads us to sense differently, as though the phantasm itself can put us in touch with the physics of the simulacrum, thereby becoming an object of pleasure. Similarly, the rigorous pursuit of the Epicurean method to its limits discloses the *clinamen* as a differential that cannot be thought. The passage to the limits causes us, in turn, to think differently. As Deleuze defines it at the end of the essay, naturalism is simply the "thought of an infinite sum, all of the elements of which are not composed at once" (*la pensée d'une somme infinie dont tous les éléments ne se composent pas à la fois*), as well as "the sensation of finite compounds which are not added up as such with one another" (*la sensation de composés finis qui ne s'additionnent pas comme tels les uns avec les autres*).⁶²

What we find, then, is that while thought and sensation have objects that are specific to them—the atom and the image, respectively—there are different modes of relating to these objects. Either one mistakes the image for the representation of a false reality, motivated by desire and fear, or one affirms it as an effect of the simulacrum and the positivity of the finite. In the same way—although Deleuze does not develop this line of thinking very far—one is either led astray by the effects of the *clinamen* to believe in free will or one comes to affirm it as a differential within matter that cannot be thought. In both cases, a selection takes place.

How should we understand this selection? In the essay on Plato, there is also a selection of sorts, at least insofar as when we affirm the rights of the simulacrum, we allow it to topple the system of models and icons and copies from within, endorsing its power at the expense of its rivals. Yet, at the same time, the fundamentally subversive role of the

⁶² Deleuze (1990a) 279 [(1969) 323].

simulacrum, within the logic of Deleuze's reading, causes it to undermine selection altogether, to the extent that selection is understood as the Platonic project of differentiating true claimants to the Idea from false pretenders.⁶³ In the Lucretius essay, by contrast, selection has a more positive function, which must be understood within the specific terms of naturalism and its critical method of traversing the real through analogy and gradation. To select *is* to affirm the true infinite, on the one hand, and the finitude of the sensible, on the other; it is, at the same time, to denounce the spirit of the negative and the phantasms that it entails (the One and the Whole, the myths of infinite pain and pleasure).⁶⁴ Understood from this perspective, the transformation of sensibility and thought brought about by naturalism always involves an active element. If the simulacrum occupies a privileged position in this process it is because Deleuze follows Epicurus and Lucretius in making the double illusion of infinite pain and pleasure the single greatest threat to pleasure. Yet it is also important to see how the process of demystification that unfolds through selection is, in the end, more ambitious than the summoning up of the simulacrum.

Naturalism, then, is a method of critique. But it is also an image or phantasm of sorts itself.⁶⁵ For to counter the illusion of the false infinite, a philosophy of pluralism must hold forth a counter-image to be affirmed by thought in the service of joy and pleasure.⁶⁶ In the Lucretius essay,

⁶³ Deleuze (1990a) 262–63 [(1969) 302–303]. See also Flaxman (2009) 22–23.

⁶⁴ Goldberg (2009) 39–40 neglects this context when he accuses Deleuze of nearly reintroducing Platonic distinctions between true and false.

⁶⁵ See Foucault (1977) 178: "Thinking . . . requires the release of a phantasm in the mime" (*Penser . . . ce serait effectuer le fantasme dans le mime*, (1970) 894). Yet thought is also, as Foucault insists, an event.

⁶⁶ The idea of the image or phantom to be held forth recurs in the main text of the *Logic of Sense*: "The logic of sense is inspired in its entirety by empiricism. Only empiricism knows how to transcend the experiential dimensions of the visible without falling into Ideas, and how to track down, invoke, and perhaps produce a phantom at the limit of a lengthened or unfolded experience" ((1990a) 20) (*La logique du sens est tout inspirée d'empirisme; mais précisément il n'y a que l'empirisme qui sache dépasser les dimensions expérimentales du visible sans tomber dans les Idées, et traquer, invoquer, peut-être produire un fantôme à la limite d'une expérience allongée, dépliée*, (1969) 32). Here, however, the image is put forth in the context of another philosophical legacy that Deleuze saw as critical to the reversal of Platonism—namely, Stoicism. He contrasts Stoicism with Epicureanism several times in the text: see esp. (1990a) 183–84 [(1969) 214–15], 335–36 n. 4 [(1969) 16 n. 4], 363 n. 29 [(1969) 320 n. 29]. The major difference between the two philosophical systems suggested by these references is that the Stoics have a more

Deleuze sees philosophy as useful precisely because it is committed to setting forth “the image of the free man” (*l’image d’un homme libre*).⁶⁷ The claim that philosophy has as its aim demystification through critique and the holding-forth of the image of the free man is (re)affirmed by Deleuze in his 1962 book on Nietzsche, where Lucretius is located at the origins of philosophy *qua* art of critical thinking and ethical affirmation and where the idea of affirmation as a form of selecting against the negative is a crucial thread.⁶⁸ In *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, first published in 1968 (as *Spinoza et la problème de l’expression*), Deleuze locates Spinoza, too, in the tradition of naturalism, recognizing that he is also committed to denouncing all myths and mystifications. Like Lucretius, Spinoza “sets the image of a positive Nature against the uncertainty of the gods” (*dresse l’image d’une Nature positive contre l’incertitude des dieux*) as part of a project of forming an ethics around the image of a free man.⁶⁹ Whereas in Epicureanism, the image of the free man is actually a simulacrum that reaches us from the space “between worlds” (*intermundium*) where the gods reside in eternal bliss,⁷⁰ for Deleuze such an image is the product of naturalism itself.

It is precisely because the power of such an image to eliminate myth depends on naturalism that naturalism must be systematically renewed. “If philosophy’s critical task is not actively taken up in every epoch,” Deleuze writes in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, “philosophy dies

developed theory of the event, which climbs to the surface not so much as a phantasm but as the incorporeal limit of all possible ideality ((1990a) 7 [(1969) 17]). The Stoics thus appear more suited to the project of the *Logic of Sense*. The phantasm that dominates the latter series in the book is represented as an event that is only “a little like” Epicurean envelopes and emanations ((1990a) 217 [(1969) 253]). But cf. Foucault (1977) [1970], who reads Epicureanism and Stoicism as fully complementary in the *Logic of Sense*.

⁶⁷ Deleuze (1990a) 278 [(1969) 322].

⁶⁸ Deleuze (1983) 106–107 [(1962) 121–22].

⁶⁹ Deleuze (1992) 270–71 [(1968) 249–50]. See also Deleuze (1995) 6 [(1990b) 14] “I see a secret link between Lucretius, Hume, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, constituted by their critique of negativity, their cultivation of joy, the hatred of interiority, the externality of forces and relations, the denunciation of power . . . and so on” (*et entre Lucrèce, Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche, il y a pour moi un lien secret constitué par la critique du négatif, la culture de la joie, la haine de l’intériorité, l’extériorité des forces et des relations, la dénonciation du pouvoir . . . , etc.*). On the tradition of Lucretian Naturalism in Deleuze, see also Hayden (2008), 25–29.

⁷⁰ See *De Rerum Natura* 6.76–77, where Lucretius suggests that we receive simulacra that emanate from the gods (located in the *intermundium*) as positive images of tranquility that serve as models for the Epicurean sage. See also 3.14–30.

and with it die the images of the philosopher and the free man” (*Si la besogne critique de la philosophie n’est pas activement reprise à chaque époque, la philosophie meurt, et avec elle l’image du philosophe et l’image de l’homme libre*).⁷¹ Deleuze’s reading of Lucretius enacts just such a renewal to counter the negative force of myth and the false infinite. In so doing, it mimics the ethical labor of the *De Rerum Natura* itself. For Lucretius knew well that we never simply *see* the true infinite. Indeed, the pressures of culture and our own natures tend to keep us from seeing what we need to see if we are to be happy. If we wish to embrace the image, disentangled from fear and impossible desire, as an object of affirmation and a source of ethical pleasure, we need Epicureanism, which is to say we need articulations and *readings* of Epicureanism. Lucretius thus uses poetry to generate in the mind of his reader “the clear light with which you might gaze into the depths of hidden things.”⁷² And indeed, the *De Rerum Natura* has persisted as the catalyst of just such ethical transformations, read and reread with ever-renewed urgency in the centuries since its rediscovery, as it is by Deleuze himself.

Readings, of course, are never simply repetitions. In a basic sense, this axiom is illustrated by Deleuze’s encounters with Lucretius over the course of his career. While he did not offer another sustained reading of the *De Rerum Natura*—from the late 1960s on, he shifted away from readings of other philosophers—he came back time and again to Lucretius, producing ever shifting images of his philosophical pluralism.⁷³ The poem thus functions in his writings not as a static object but as a dynamic field of generative potential, catalyzing at each encounter new strategies for conceptualizing the diverse and the multiple.

More important, the images of naturalism that readings of Lucretius produce are never copies of an Epicurean original: Deleuze, that is, does not reproduce Lucretius’s poem as the Same. Rather, beneath the threshold of the text of his essay lies a space “between surfaces” that troubles both the notion of an original faithfully reproduced at the moment of

⁷¹ Deleuze (1983) 107 [(1962) 122].

⁷² *De Rerum Natura* 1.144–45. See Holmes (2005) 575–77.

⁷³ See above, n. 7, on Lucretius in Deleuze’s later work. As D. W. Smith (2006) 116 observes, the simulacrum falls out of Deleuze’s philosophical vocabulary after the publication of *Difference and Repetition* in 1968; see also D. W. Smith (2009). But cf. M. Cooper (2002) for the importance of the Epicurean-Lucretian simulacrum to Deleuze’s later work on the image.

its reception and the notion of a reading faithful to the original text. What we encounter as readers of Deleuze's reading of Lucretius is an image of thought as the dazzling effect of the dynamics of thought triggered by the Epicurean impulse. In reading the essay, we enact, in turn, transmission as another round of repetition and perversion. Naturalism erupts once again within a present where it remains as necessary as ever.

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