

“Abundance” Rather than “Scarcity”: Deleuze's Microscopic View about Theory of Desire Politics

Yihan Jiang

Southwest University, Chongqing 400715, China.

Abstract: Deleuze believes that the traditional theory of desire scarcity is essentially an idealistic view, which is in line with the logic of capital operation, and realizes the “closure” of productive nature of “desire” by creating “scarcity anxiety”, thus enlarging the capitalists' pursuit of “profit maximization” and consumers' desire for consumption pleasure, and resulting in a fetishistic sight of alienation between people and differentiation between people and things. He inherited the views of Nietzsche, Bataille, and Marx, and believed that “desire” should be combined with “production” to achieve a materialistic turn. “Desire” does not arise from scarcity or deficiency, as Freud and Lacan say, but is a productive and flowing machine, a creative revolutionary force.

Keywords: Deleuze; Desire; Scarcity; Abundance

Introduction

Gilles Louis René Deleuze is a French postmodernist philosopher. In collaboration with Felix Guattari, he devoted himself to the reflection and criticism of capitalist society since the “*May Storm*” in France in 1968, which caused an uproar in the theoretical circle. The most outstanding contribution of Deleuze's philosophy is that he revises the definition of “desire” in traditional philosophy with his own theoretical system, and forms a unique political theory of desire, thus providing a new perspective for the study of Marxist liberation theory.

1. Scarcity: The Origin and Fallacy of Traditional Desire Theory

Western philosophers before Deleuze tended to equate “desire” with “need” or “want”. Plato divided the human soul into three parts: reason, passion, and desire. “Desire” is at the bottom of the soul, and is a physical impulse generated by “dissatisfaction”, which must be guided and suppressed by reason to prevent such “dissatisfaction” from bringing “trouble”. Based on this, Western philosophy began to view “desire” as the absence of an object, a passive and negative force, “a deficiency that exists and is eagerly filled through the acquisition of an object.”^[2]

Freud believed that “many human wishes, especially desires, are suppressed in their own unconsciousness for reasons that are contrary to the social moral norms.”^[3] Lacan proposed the ternary theory of “need-demand-desire”, which holds that “desire is the desire of others”, and “desire” originates from the physiological deficiency of the subject, what people desire is precisely what they are missing. Desire is essentially a response to scarcity. What Freud and Lacan have in common is that they attach importance to the biological nature of “desire” and regard it as a remedial impulse caused by some loss, linking “desire” with lack.

In Deleuze's view, it is wrong to associate “desire” with the law of absence and the criterion of pleasure, and the association between “desire - pleasure - absence” must be broken. Western philosophers forcibly separated “desire” from “production”, deliberately sewn “desire” with deficiency, and guided individuals to mistake “desire” for their own physical deficiency or scarcity, thus establishing the connection between the subject of desire and something in the objective world. In this way, “desire” is forced to be bound up in fetters of scarcity, and its own productive and constructive nature is ignored, almost reduced to an idealistic concept. Although a small number of Western philosophers have not completely dismissed the productive nature of “desire”, for example, Kant believes that the special feature of desire is that it can produce its internal object in the form of illusion or fantasy. However, this viewpoint does not consider the production of “desire” as social production in the real sense, but only acknowledge the role that “desire” plays in the production of fantasy or illusion to some extent. Therefore, it is still idealistic at its core.

2. Essence: The Class Nature of Traditional Desire Scarcity Theory

According to the traditional desire theory, “desire” originates from the subject's sense of scarcity of things that have not been obtained or fulfilled, and the “desire” caused by this sense of scarcity has no possibility of being satisfied once and for all. For example,

Sartre said that “the absence of realite humane in the world”^[4], absence is the real representation of human nature, human existence is a kind of missing existence. Kojève further pointed out that looking at human reality from the perspective of “desire” in human genetics is essentially a function of “acknowledging” desire.^[5] “Desire” comes from scarcity and dissatisfaction while accompanied by the desire to obtain “recognition” from other people, and the standard of this “recognition” must come from another people’s “recognition”. In such an infinite cycle, “desire” is forced into a state of “endless” delay.

Deleuze exposes the class nature and theoretical scheme of this view of desire scarcity, pointing out that deliberately creating scarcity is a common tactic used by capitalists, and skillfully resolving the crisis of “surplus products” with “scarcity anxiety” is the “art” of capitalist market economy. By means of celebrity endorsement, promotional discounts, fashion packaging and other means, capitalists continuously stimulate individuals' sense of scarcity of goods. Although the “desire” itself is not lacking, the false pleasure brought by actual consumption behavior makes the subject mistakenly believe that obtaining external materials is a kind of self-realization, resulting in an illusion of infinite scarcity, and hoping to regain or welcome back the missing items.

In summary, Deleuze believes that the theory of desire scarcity is essentially an idealistic concept, which is in line with the logic of capital operation, and realizes the “closure” of productive nature of “desire” by creating “scarcity anxiety”, thus enlarging the capitalists' pursuit of “profit maximization” and consumers' desire for consumption pleasure, and resulting in a fetishistic sight of alienation between people and differentiation between people and things.

3. Abundance: A Revision of the Traditional Theory of Desire Scarcity

Deleuze does not agree with directly equating ‘desire’ with scarcity and deficiency. Based on different views of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Freud, and others, he reformed the traditional theory of scarcity.

Firstly, he clarified that the essence of “desire” is “abundance” rather than “scarcity”. In Deleuze's view, “desire is a relationship of reality, not of satisfaction.”^[6] “Desire” is not a lack of need but active giving, a “virtue of giving.” “Desire” has the characteristics of abundance, generation and flowing, and does not need to obtain satisfaction from the outside. It is a “desire machine” that can achieve abundance through self-generation, and can produce realistic material products by connecting with objects once started.

Secondly, he clarified the relationship between the subject and object of “desire” and “desire”. The traditional desire theory equates “desire” with the subject's lack of object, believing that the causal relationship between “desire” and the subject and object is due to “scarcity” leading to “demand”. Deleuze believes that “desire” does not lack an object, and that “desire machines” always appear at the same time as “desire” objects no matter when and where they are connected, and integrate with the object. There is no fixed subject for “desire”, and for freely flowing desires, the subject means the solidification and territorialization of “desire”, which means that “desire” is captured and encoded by the “self” and “superego”, as well as national and social norms.^[7] In summary, “desire” coexists and coexists with all things in the world in eternal flow and generation, and creates accidental, temporary, and random connections when it intersects with the subject and object. There is no fixed subject and object, and there is a lack of necessary causal connections.

Thirdly, he clarified the productive nature of “desire”. Deleuze referred to the position that Marx gave capital in production and gave “desire” an equal position in production. From the active and positive sense, the “desire” is integrated with the production dynamics, breaking through Freud's biological vision of “desire” as “Libido”. “Desire” is regarded as a generative force with self-creation and self-affirmation, and the social production activity is nothing more than “direct investment” of “desire” under certain conditions, and is the production activity of “desire” itself, which realizes the materialist turn of desire theory.

Fourthly, he accused capitalism of stifling the freedom of production of “desire”. When “desire” is completely free from the constraints of subject and object and freely produces, it has entered the realm of “body without organs.” “Body without organs” is a “peach blossom” constructed by Deleuze for “desire machine” in the field of thought, implying that in the social reality, “desire” production is bound by various shackles, individuals lose their freedom rights, and become “puppets” of capital operation. He condemned capitalism for its frenzied production of wealth and misery, and said, “Although human rights actively participate in liberal capitalism, they do not bring the ‘pleasures’ of liberal capitalism to us.”^{[1]197} Here it is not only the dispossessed workers who lose their freedom, but also the bourgeoisie itself, whose freedom consists in the fact that, like the proletariat, they are not forced to sell their labour-power in order to earn a living, that is all.^[8]

Conclusion

Gilles Deleuze inherited Nietzsche's affirmation of “desire”, relied on the basic category of Marxism, criticized the colonization of “desire” by capitalist discourse and system, reinterpreted the essence of “desire”, completely subverted traditional views on desire, and

constructed a micro political desire theory. As scholars have said, “These works are playful in spirit and groundbreaking in form, but they are very serious in philosophical and political purposes.”^[9] Although he established an order that is still utopian, it is undeniable that he made us more aware of the necessity of seeking micro “liberation” of humans, leading us to embark on a postmodern “ideological adventure” journey. Although it may seem outdated, it extends the research perspective of Marxism and has significant theoretical value that cannot be ignored.

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