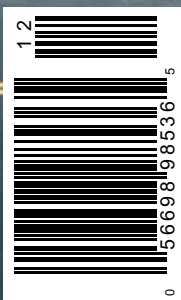


# Cabinet

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## NO, OEDIPUS DOES NOT EXIST

BEN KAFKA & JAMIESON WEBSTER

*Against the walls of the [Oedipal] triangle, toward the outside, flows exert the irresistible pressure of lava or the invincible oozing of water. ... Who does not feel in the flows of his desire both the lava and the water?*

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*

“Who does not feel in the flows of his desire both the lava and the water?” Deleuze and Guattari asked in their 1972 bestseller *Anti-Oedipus*. The events of May 1968 had stirred the utopian dream of another, less repressive, social structure. New arrangements were to spread out rhizomatically across the surface of the earth, or, as with the flows of lava and the oozing of water, desire was to disrupt the surface and be the force of an endlessly changing landscape like the silt islands in the mouth of a delta. For those with such a dream, the static Oedipal arrangement was the normative obstacle and enemy. “Your Oedipus is a fucking drag, keep it up and the analysis will be stopped,” they moan. The familial arrangement, whose form *par excellence* is Oedipal, is the drag on desire.

The occasion for the drawing reproduced here also happens to be a familial one: Gilles Deleuze, his wife Fanny, and their children Julien, age ten, and Emilie, eight, meet around a table to inscribe a copy of *Anti-Oedipus* to Michel Foucault. Deleuze has written a few words: “For Michel, admiration and affection, and for shared causes, intolerably, where I will follow you.” Fanny, who seems to be having fun, signs the page “schizophrenically.” Hard to tell whether Guattari was there with them, or whether he added his illegible initials later—no matter how hard Deleuze tried to include him, Guattari never quite fit into the story. The children take a box of felt-tipped markers and draw pictures: an exploding volcano sending terrified women and children fleeing their homes in search of safety; a fisherman sitting tranquilly, having a drink, oblivious to the chaos just beneath the surface, the danger overhead.

In this inscription we see traces of a friendship. Or to be more precise: traces of fountain pens and felt markers that attest to a friendship, which, sadly, was nearing its end. Strictly speaking, the inscription is ungrammatical: the word *intolerably* is full of sound and fury but modifies nothing. In fact it’s a friendly wink to their “shared cause,” the Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons (GIP), which Foucault had formed in 1971, and which Deleuze joined soon after. The rhetoric of the “intolerable” circulated throughout the group’s

publications and speeches, the master signifier of everything they rejected (“the courts, the cops, the hospitals, the asylums, school, military service, the press, TV, the state”).

As it happens, though, they soon came to find each other intolerable as well. In the same year that Foucault wrote the introduction to the English edition of *Anti-Oedipus*, praising it as “the first book of ethics to be written in France in quite a long time ... an *Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life*,” they fell out over rival petitions on behalf of Klaus Croissant, a lawyer for the Baader-Meinhof gang who had taken refuge in France. Concerned with what he perceived as the romanticization of political violence, Foucault refused to sign the petition circulated by Deleuze and Guattari, preferring another petition in its place.

We can detect some of Foucault’s anger beneath the otherwise placid prose of the first volume of *History of Sexuality*. “One denounces Freud’s conformism, the normalizing functions of psychoanalysis, the obvious timidity underlying Reich’s vehemence, and all the effects of integration ensured by the ‘science’ of sex,” Foucault writes, implicitly referencing *Anti-Oedipus*. “This discourse on modern sexual repression holds up well, owing no doubt to how easy it is to hold up.” Oh, snap. The silence that descends on this intellectual friendship holds through to Foucault’s death eight years later in 1984, much, it seems, to Deleuze’s regret.

. . .

Having finished their drawings, the children run off to their next activity, leaving the mess of markers behind. Gilles sits there at the table pondering the scene in front of him. A thought occurs to him; he picks up one of the markers, and adds a caption to this charming family portrait: “No, Oedipus does not exist.”

Dialectically, he negates his own negation! If only we could hear him speak this cryptic phrase we might get some idea of what he meant, or better still, what he *wished*. Its placement on the page, the spontaneity of the phrasing, suggests that he was at the very least surprised. Surprised by what, though? Surprised to see the lava and water flowing through his own children’s desire? Or surprised to find that Oedipus, blind and crippled, is nevertheless invincible?

Children say the darndest things; they draw the most damning. Julien’s picture of a man fishing reminds us of the stoic emperors precious to both Deleuze and Foucault. If the fishing “rod” comes dangerously close

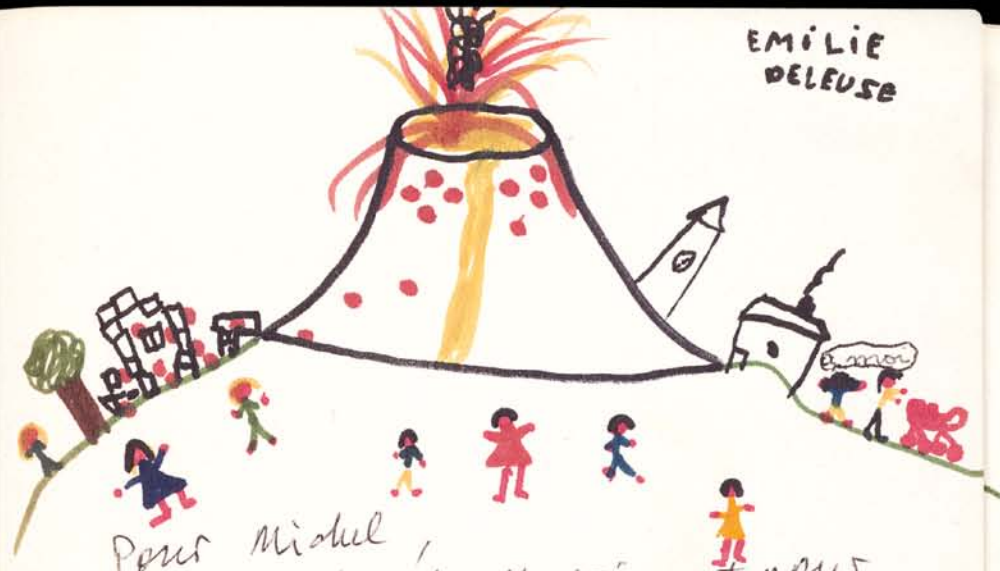
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overleaf: The Deleuzes working out their issues in an inscription to Foucault.

Non,  
Oedipe n'existe  
pas



EMILIE  
DELEUSE



Pour Michel,  
admiration et affection et pour  
des causes communes, intolérablement,  
on n'vous m'irai

Julien

n. w.

Schizo phœnétiqument

fanny



Julien

to his mother's signature, Julien is not alarmed; the man is only fishing. What is taking place beneath the calm of the water's surface, however, is another scene entirely, one that begins with the lure that this fishing rod introduces. The lure initiates a series of exchanges beyond the gaze of this emperor-father. Is the choice one between being the fisherman, being the fisherman's object (his catch), or making him yours, the object of your vigilant gaze? What is Julien's question?

In effect, Julien's illustration reveals the power of Oedipal wishes and conflicts that structure unconscious fantasy. The father is potent but oblivious as creatures swarm around him and the earth erodes beneath him. The mother seems alert to the threat but incapacitated by a mysterious bleeding. The sister, small, naive, is about to take the father's bait. The brother, meanwhile, looks on, distracted by the mother's wound, endangered by the crumbling earth.

Or maybe, to frame the scene differently, Julien identifies with the lizard, perched safely atop the tree, sticking his tongue out at the father. Whatever the case, as we follow the scene counterclockwise, it tells the story of a father who chases his daughter with his rod, a son intrigued by his mother's wound, and, in the spermatazoa that chase each other up the tree, the boy's admirable attempt to answer the question, Where do babies come from?

There's something wonderful about Emilie's volcano drawing, so close to the affirmative force of desire, its deterritorialization, that is spoken of so often in *Anti-Oedipus*. All those who run from the volcano, from the cities in the throes of destruction, appear to be women and children. If you will allow us—the father, if there is one in this drawing, is not a stoic emperor, nor a fisherman, but the volcano itself. A father's desire (no less, being Gilles, his desire for desire) is a large thing for a daughter to wrestle with, even if you don't believe in Oedipus.

We would like to draw your attention to the very right of the drawing where there are two figures turned in different directions: one whose back is seen and who runs not to but from the viewer, and the other who is drawn in profile with a baby carriage. These two seem to delineate different lines of flight from all the rest. Does this mark Emilie's familial scene? It is hard to know. What it certainly does mark is a change in the arrangement and one that she got her mother involved with, since the handwriting is clearly Fanny's. "A moi!" A possessive term—an emphatic "mine," or an eager "my turn." Is this a final cry of self-possession before the fires of desire stake their claim? Is this a feminine

plea by a little girl with her mother and her mother's new baby—"my turn"? Is it even, possibly, a plea for the feminine—something that isn't easily found in Deleuze's work, no less French bourgeois family life? Or is it again, like her older brother's drawing, designating a place beyond the gaze?

The psychoanalytic rebuttal to *Anti-Oedipus* centered on the book's inability to take into account suffering and terror—what analysts like to call, to everyone's consternation, "castration anxiety"—implicit in neurosis, to say nothing of the schizophrenia that Deleuze and Guattari valorized. Certainly Oedipus acts like a life raft, as do most identifications with structures of power, leaving behind the nagging question of where babies come from and some mystery as to the inseminating role of fathers. The psychoanalysts belt out their words of caution: it cannot be, willy-nilly, torn asunder. The arrangements of desire, especially in their familial dimension, must be tirelessly analyzed.

When Foucault launched his own attack on psychoanalysis a few years later, he felt no need to proclaim that Oedipus did not exist. Having discarded the concept of the unconscious, it simply wasn't worth talking about any longer. Deleuze's comment on the left-hand page, his negation of the negation, shows that he was not ready to take that step. It reflects a more subtle ambivalence that persists throughout *Anti-Oedipus*, beneath the theoretical provocation and rhetorical excess. Perhaps, in sending these drawings to his friend, in marking and remarking on them with a double negative, Deleuze was warning Foucault not to make the mistake he very nearly made, and that so many of his followers have made since: to think that Oedipus would not return.

Our reading of these drawings is of course speculative, but clearly the invitation to make an inscription on one's father's book, given to his most cherished colleague and rival, invites significance. We cannot but think of the powerful memory Freud had of his father allowing him to tear out the pages of a book as a young child. His passion for books, no less his many dreams about them, was indelibly inscribed at that moment as an instance of exquisite sanctioned transgression. Whether you want to consider it a momentary Oedipal victory is up to you. Certainly Freud did. We would speculate that something similar is at work in the beautifully rigorous symmetry of this page out of the Deleuze family history.