

JAMES BROWN - THE 'ILLOGIC' OF INNOVATION

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While James Brown's pioneering music continues to attract great critical acclaim, it is not widely acknowledged that his own musicians were less than effusive about his famed compositions. Brown's musically 'educated' band members have often expressed the view that his prototype funk compositions were simplistic and unsophisticated and therefore not to be taken very seriously. This view is strikingly borne out in Fred Wesley's recent book, *Hit Me Fred: Confessions of a Sideman* (2003), in which Brown's former bandleader provides the most comprehensive insight to date into the trials and tribulations of working with the 'Godfather of Soul'. Wesley was among the core of abundantly talented former jazz players - Alfred 'Pee Wee' Ellis, Maceo Parker, Waymond Reed were others - of Brown's premiere late 1960s -early 1970s troupes. Prior to their recruitment into Brown's band, these musicians were aspirant be-boppers. As ex-James Brown bandleader, 'Pee Wee' Ellis would later say, 'he was some other stuff for me; I'd been studying Sonny Rollins'.¹

This 'other stuff' to which Ellis refers was 'funk', but it might also be a euphemism for Brown's notoriously 'idiosyncratic' approach to composition in general - one that Wesley would subsequently lament:

Mr Brown would sometimes come to the gig early and have what we call a 'jam', where we would have to join in with his fooling around on the organ. This was painful for anyone who had ever thought of playing jazz. James Brown's organ playing was just good enough to fool the untrained ear, and so bad that it made real musicians sick on the stomach.²

This sentiment is echoed by long-time Brown stalwart and drumming legend, John 'Jabo' Starks, who recalls

James would come in and get the sticks and sit down behind the drums and say, 'well, this is the way I want you to play it. 'And you still haven't figured out which way he wanted it to go. Your best answer was, "OK, gotcha Mr. Brown'. So you'd sit right back down and play what you were playing anyway. Because he never really played! Hey, man, I'm being honest, James did not play anything! He even wanted to fool around with the guitar! And he couldn't!³

Brown's musical shortcomings, coupled with his notoriously autocratic style of leadership, made for a difficult gig. By all reports, his despotism often made for a demeaning and debilitating experience and, from time to time, his musicians would avenge such maltreatment by belittling their employer's musical ability. An example of note from Wesley's book involves the antics of former trumpeter Waymond Reed, whom Wesley cites as one of the most consistently confrontational members of the group:

In the dressing room, he [Reed] took out his horn and for hours and more hours played parts of Count Basie's *Shiny Stockings*, pausing between licks to laugh real loud and say stuff like, 'That's real music, not the honky-tonk stuff we have to play on this gig'.⁴

The musicians' collective frustration was compounded by the fact that playing popular music was a far more lucrative proposition than was generally offered in the jazz world. Indeed, the more prominent members of the James Brown bands looked upon their tenure with Brown as a stepping-stone to a higher calling. The cantankerous Waymond Reed, for example, went on to play with Max Roach and the Count Basie Orchestra, and was later joined by Fred Wesley, while 'Pee Wee' Ellis would go on to assume the directorship of Van Morrison's band.⁵ Harboring such musical ambition, the musicians' animosity toward Brown's restrictive musical vision is less than surprising. To add further insult to injury, Brown would subsequently bask in the acclaim afforded his revolutionary funk style, despite the fact that he did not even understand basic music theory. As Wesley explains:

Simple things like knowing the key would be a big problem for James. So, when James would mouth out some guitar part, which might or might not have had anything to do with the actual song being played, Jimmy or Country [former James Brown guitarists] would have to attempt to play it simply because James was still in charge. We all had to pretend that we knew what James was talking about. Nobody ever said, 'That's ridiculous' or 'You don't know what you're talking about'.⁶

Among the prerequisites for the job of Brown's bandleader was an ability to successfully translate the boss' grunts and groans (for the uninitiated, think an early version of 'beatboxing') into releasable product. As 'Pee Wee' Ellis informs the reader of *Lenny Henry Hunts the Funk* (1992),⁷ Brown would merely grunt certain 'feels' and then demand that the current bandleader translate them into musical notation.⁸ In glaring contrast to the musical prowess of his esteemed alumni, the only virtuosity Brown is known to have displayed (his organ-playing is a source of contention) was his ability to mouth sounds to his bandleaders:

I kept on putting together James's hums and grunts and groans, and making music out of them, no matter how stupid I thought it was. I began to take pride in my ability to make something out of anything or something out of nothing or something out of any combination of things. I gave James no trouble when he laid out formats to songs. I simply took the orders as he gave them, never questioning, and worried about how to make it happen later. But sometimes I had trouble getting the musicians to accept such unorthodox patterns as readily as I did. I had to argue, convince, trick, and manipulate guys into doing all kinds of unusual things.⁹

From this perspective, one could hardly blame Wesley for believing Brown's music to be a great embarrassment, especially as he would find himself having to negotiate respected studio musicians to play this 'silly music'.¹⁰ All in all, Brown's ex-employees often expressed disdain

for their association with his music. Wesley, for instance, has spoken of his embarrassment over the compositions with which he was involved, even though they were among Brown's most popular titles:

I was getting credit for a lot of the music, as most people were looking at the music as James's and mine together. While I admit that I did most of the implementation of the music, the concepts were practically all his. It didn't sit right with me to be getting credit for music, especially since, frankly, I didn't think it was all that great ... I got this sick feeling when anyone told me how great 'Pass The Peas' was.¹¹

Such disillusioning accounts of Brown's unorthodox approach to composition raise some intriguing questions. How did Brown manage to maintain the level of agency required not only to direct such talent, but also to synthesise such differences of musical opinion into the cohesive and enduring influence on popular music it has since become? The James Brown story points to an interesting inconsistency in the supposed correlation between hands-on pragmatism and its relation to actual musical agency, providing, instead, a tale of ruthless determination victorious over traditionally recognised 'ability'. How might we begin to account for this tremendous innovation achieved by a man who, by all accounts, could barely play an instrument?

THE IDIOT

To analyse Brown's inimitable compositional processes most fruitfully, I would suggest that an application of Deleuze's concept of the 'Idiot' might be beneficial. This is not, it should be said at the outset, to speak ill of the 'Godfather of Soul'. On the contrary, I will attempt to illustrate how a certain type of naiveté was necessary to realise one of music's most creative forces. For, one of Brown's most enduring gifts to contemporary music practice was his willing embrace of 'illogic' in the face of a dogmatic image of musical thought, a quality shared with the Deleuzian Idiot of *Difference and Repetition* (1968).

The Idiot character plays a pivotal role in Deleuze's quest for a way of conceiving a philosophy undaunted by the presuppositions of a 'dogmatic' image of thought. This 'dogmatic' image of thought can be broadly perceived as any institutionally dominant form of thinking, or that propensity to reinforce already dominant modes of thought. It is in the 'The Image of Thought' chapter of *Difference and Repetition* that Deleuze develops the Idiot as a type of perspectival character or what he and Guattari would later term a 'conceptual persona'.¹² The Idiot will ask 'what would it mean to start philosophy "undogmatically", or with an image that secretes no illusions of transcendence'.¹³ Deleuze and Guattari have also referred to dogmatic images of thought as 'state thought' because of their attempts to institute the *general* as universalised and transcendent laws of 'common sense'. Our notions and practices of 'common sense' are always in danger of involving dogmatic images of thought in so far as their propositions are those of uniform objectivity and rationality by default, and thus limiting to our perception of difference.

Deleuze attacks the dogmatic image of thought as it harbours the presupposition in

philosophy, and he arrives at his critique of presuppositions via a critique of Descartes' *cogito*, in which 'I think therefore I am' presents itself as a basic proposition in need of no further explanation, a 'common sense' that will generally govern many common images of thought in philosophy.¹⁴

Yet, while Deleuze is in fundamental disagreement with Descartes over the cogito's dogmatic image of thought, he does allow for the fact that the concept was also revolutionary for philosophy, in the sense that its egalitarian nature appealed to the perspective of the untrained philosopher. Deleuze argues that Descartes' concept ascribes to sense a common property: 'it has the form of "Everybody knows ..."' ¹⁵ The cogito thus liberated 'common sense', but this, in its turn, would become a problem, as common sense became institutionalised and defended for the sake of its own perpetuity. To break with the overwhelming institutional and dogmatic power of common sense requires a naïve figure. Rather than resolutely adhere to the 'subjective presupposition' of 'I think therefore I am', the Idiot naively champions an egalitarian approach to philosophy, which

opposes the 'idiot' to the pedant, Eudoxus to Epistemon, good will to the overfull understanding, the individual man endowed only with his natural capacity for thought to the man perverted by the generalities of his time. The philosopher takes the side of the idiot as though of a man without presuppositions.¹⁶

The Idiot exemplifies how a departure from subjective presuppositions can overcome the apparent objectivity of 'public' thought, just as Brown would challenge what 'music' *should* be. I emphasise the word *should*, here, because it is precisely the limitations of opinion that inform 'common sense'. Primary to this general common sense is the maintenance of the identity of the concept, conceptual propositions that become the overarching figures of public opinion and that are, by nature, antithetical to *becoming*. This is why Deleuze, despite his reservations about the orthodoxy it would become, praises Descartes' Idiot for opposing a form of 'private' thought to the more 'public' and uncontested institutional thought of Descartes' time. As John Rajchman comments in his excellent overview of the philosopher's project, *The Deleuze Connections*:

With such Idiots, the pragmatic presuppositions of philosophy shift, revealing new relations between 'private' and 'public'. One example (not mentioned by Deleuze) might be Wittgenstein, always ill at ease with his public professorship and with the emergence of a new analytic 'scholasticism', who declared, 'the philosopher is a citizen of no circle of ideas; that is just what makes him a philosopher'.¹⁷

It is important to recognise that there are two sides to Deleuze's engagement with the cogito here. On one hand, Descartes' cogito is responsible for the presupposition that Deleuze is criticising; on the other hand, Deleuze will also celebrate the role of the cogito in its promotion of a democratic and 'private' philosophy, a concept to which he referred in his later work as 'outside thought'.¹⁸ 'Outside thought' can be perceived as the antithesis of a 'state philosophy' and is fundamental to any becoming. Hence, what should interest us is not the creation of a

new common sense, but a continuation of the Idiot's power of naivety to cultivate such 'private thought' as 'outside thought'. This is a thought that can, in fact, counteract state thought's tendency towards a homogeneous and universalising 'common sense'. As Brian Massumi remarks in the foreword to his translation of *A Thousand Plateaus*, this 'state thought' or 'public thought' is typified by a form of 'representational thinking that has characterised Western metaphysics since Plato' and which 'reposes on a double identity: of the thinking subject, and of the concepts it creates and to which it lends its own presumed attributes of sameness and constancy'.¹⁹ In praise of such 'private' thought, Deleuze has famously championed those figures who dare to be naïve in the face of conventional 'common sense'. This 'private' thought is the domain of the Idiot who lacks sufficient knowledge to uphold the dominant image of thought.

All artists are Idiots, then, in the sense that their creativity depends on flouting 'public thought', in order to wilfully plunge the world into the relative chaos of unorthodoxy. Perhaps it was Brown's resistance to the orthodox way of making music that would appeal to the egalitarian musical outlook of a new generation of musical Idiots, those DJs and dance music producers of the future, who would so enthusiastically sample and synthesise Brown's refrains into new and unforeseen musical connections.

The celebration of those artists, philosophers and scientists who attempt to think without presupposition is a recurrent theme throughout Deleuze's work. For instance, the Cartesian Idiot to be found in *Difference and Repetition* will be subsequently transformed into a Dostoyevskian Russian Idiot by the time we get to *Cinema 2*.²⁰ John Rajchman says that Deleuze's series of naïve characters shows us 'that the only way to "start without presuppositions" in philosophy is to become some sort of Russian Idiot, giving up the presumptions of common sense, throwing away one's "hermeneutic compass" and instead trying to turn one's "idiocy" into the "idiosyncrasies" of a style of thinking "in other ways"'.²¹

These 'other ways' of approaching thought, exemplified by the Idiot, might be perceived in terms of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the diagram or map. Their dynamic idea of the map is one that allows new aspects of territories to come into play. Guattari proposes the diagram 'as an autopoietic machine', which not only gives 'a functional and material consistency, but [also] requires it to deploy its diverse registers of alterity, freeing it from an identity locked into simple structural relations'.²² The aim of the diagram is that 'the machine's proto-subjectivity installs itself in Universes of virtuality which extend far beyond its existential territoriality'.²³ Quite simply, the function of these diagrammatic *machines* is to generate flows of relations rather than a fixed spatial representation. This allows a more flexible means of interpretation of what can happen next. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the map 'is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification'.²⁴ In other words, when freed from the strictures of the maintenance of identity we can begin to think within the realm of virtual relations. Working with virtual relations, before they are actualised, maintains an orientation towards becoming rather than the maintenance of an identity of concepts.

If thought cannot appeal to the identity of 'forms' inherent in 'common sense' it must entail a more intuitive process: the Idiot's faith in difference which is manifest in chance, and stumbled upon through experimentation. This naïve faith in difference obviously requires a particular audacity, and James Brown most certainly possessed such a quality, as Wesley testified

with regard to Brown's 'jamming' in the recollection quoted above.²⁵

Brown fans are rather less likely to judge the man's apparent lack of instrumental proficiency so harshly, and his idiosyncratic musicianship is of course acceptable to many ears. In fact Brown's musical talent was of a multi-instrumental capability: there was his aforementioned penchant for organ, but his other notable instrumental contributions to his records include the more than passable drumming on several early recordings, including the well-known 1962 hit version of *Night Train* (1962). The verdicts of Brown's peers may thus appear overly harsh as they were judging him within the domain of the 'real' musician. In spite of such criticisms, Brown's organ or piano accompaniment can be inspirational precisely because of this very incongruity. Instead of trying to maintain a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' musicianship, we need to recognise how this concept of the 'real' musician itself functions as a constricting presupposition and one that can never be conducive to musical innovation. Hence my argument that a key part of Brown's ultimate legacy was his frank ambivalence toward such a distinction.

It was an ambivalence that Deleuze shared. For the philosopher himself proceeded through the philosophical world brandishing his own naïve outlook on things. Deleuze found it of fundamental importance to challenge a history of philosophy in which thought has a 'natural' orientation towards truth, and where notions of common logic and reason will necessarily elaborate this truth. He is sceptical about the validity of any will-to-truth that implies an *a priori* nature of thought, with an assumed teleology, meaning and logic.

This is why using Deleuze to approach James Brown's music is not such a strange strategy. My own initial attraction to Brown's music was due to its flagrantly unconventional nature: some of it, in fact, seems downright bizarre even today, but especially when contrasted with the work of his soul music contemporaries. Yet, this subversive approach to composition would most effectively channel the dynamism of the civil rights era and catalyse it into musical aesthetics. The apparent formal simplicity of funk was key to its vital territorial presence, driven, as it was, by an ensemble approach very much at odds with the individualistic virtuosity of the modern jazz styles beloved by his musicians. In this respect, Brown's music can be seen to have gravitated towards a 'minor becoming' in which, as Deleuze and Guattari tell us, 'everything takes on a collective value'.²⁶

The Deleuze-Guattarian concept of the 'minor' originally appeared in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975) and was further elaborated in their subsequent works, most notably *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). It is important to note that Deleuze and Guattari do not propose the categories of major and minor in terms of quantitative relations, but posit that they should be perceived, instead, as reflections of relative power:

The difference between minorities and majorities isn't their size. A minority may be bigger than a majority. What defines the majority is a model you have to conform to: the average European adult male city-dweller, for example ... A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it's a becoming, a process. One might say the majority is nobody. Everybody's caught, one way or another, in a minority becoming that would lead them into unknown paths if they opted to follow it through. When a minority creates models for itself, it's because it wants to become a majority, and probably has to, to survive or prosper (to have a state, be

recognized, establish its rights, for example). But its power comes from what it's managed to create, which to some extent goes into the model, but doesn't depend on it: A people is always a creative minority, and remains one even when it acquires a majority: it can be both at once, because the two things aren't lived out on the same plane.²⁷

For Deleuze and Guattari, the minor is always in a process of 'becoming' in relation to the majoritarian or dominant forces of 'stratification' (as static framing). Quite simply, if the majoritarian is a conformity to the general state of things, then the minority is becoming something else. The differences between the two can perhaps be understood in the following way. The purpose of the majoritarian is to maintain stasis via common sense, similitude, habit, banality and pretty much all of the other methods of maintaining the apparent stability of everyday life. The majoritarian culture must, by nature, embrace conformity as it tries to keep bodies moving in a given space rather than allowing a shifting space to move through changing bodies.

The minor, then, can be perceived as the escape route from the dominant culture. In this sense, given that life is change, the minor culture is always better oriented to embrace this change than is its major counterpart. Deleuze and Guattari have summarised these opposing orientations in the following way: 'we must distinguish between the majoritarian as a constant and homogeneous system; minorities as subsystems; and the minoritarian as a potential, creative and created, becoming'.²⁸

As it is always becoming, the minor has no identity *per se*, and thus eludes a place in the official truths of history. For this reason the minor will instead take up what might be perceived as the 'false' (from the point of view of 'official truth' or 'common sense'). In this respect, the minor is faithful not so much to a concept of individual identity as to one of collective becoming.

Hence it would be fair to maintain that Brown's collective approach to composition, and his tendency to treat his band as a rhythm machine, were more reflective of the image of thought that underlies 'minor becoming' than that of the individual agency that drove the ideal of the virtuoso still prevalent in, say, the be-bop jazz movement of his time.

Brown's minor approach to musical composition required a philosophical leap and one that could only result from the unregimented perspective of the naïve, or of those minorities who have yet to master and majorise a language:

talent isn't abundant ... there are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation that would belong to this or that 'master' and that could be separated from a collective enunciation. Indeed, scarcity of talent is in fact beneficial and allows the conception of something other than a literature of masters; what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement.²⁹

While Brown was often the nominal 'author' of his work, funk was dependent on an ensemble of interlocking grooves woven together with formidable intricacy. This collective approach, in turn, would begin to influence the shift away from virtuoso performances toward more abstract

forms of composition - such as the abstraction that is audible in some of Brown's most nebulous arrangements, as described in the following anecdote from Mike D of the Beastie Boys:

Adam was talking to this guy about the song *The Payback* by James Brown. And the guy was trying to say that the guitar was playing nothing. But see, I figure, well, if the guitar is playing nothing, then that means the entire band is playing nothing. But, then, that's the best playing ever on, like, any song. And they're all playing nothing.³⁰

Brown's abstract approach to composition was a product of a commitment to difference. It would influence, in turn, those musicians who similarly prized difference over orthodoxy, and who were committed to a musical *becoming* through a willingness to *forget* the rules. The Miles Davis of the late 1960s, who was listening to Brown with interest, would do just that. In 1968, Davis publicly declared, 'My favorite music is Stockhausen, *Tosca* and James Brown',³¹ and funk would impel Davis to redefine his own approach to composition, as Bob Belden recounts in the liner notes for Davis' *On the Corner* (1972):

Davis had moved closer and closer to the funk-based sound of James Brown and Sly Stone, and the musicians he hired began to reflect this direction in his tastes. The first musician Davis would hire was Michael Henderson, an accomplished funk bass player. Henderson's 'locked in' bass grooves simplified the ground that Davis wanted to walk on. Davis' sound headed to the bottom of the band.³²

As documented on albums such as *Bitches' Brew* (1971) and *On the Corner* (1972), Davis' 'radical' turn in the early 1970s was marked by this stylistic shift to an emphasis on groove rather than solos:

Miles followed his interest in Brown's experimental funk 'down into a deep African thing, a deep African-American groove, with a lot of emphasis on drums and rhythm, and not on individual solos'. When Miles added Brown's funk, Sly Stone's rhythmically innovative soul, and Hendrix's rock to his musical mix, the results were spectacular.³³

Given Davis' attention to Brown's work at this time, there is an acute irony in the fact that a man who was maligned among his own band for his apparent musical ineptitude should end up influencing the very musicians they most admired. While Brown's personnel were occupied with dreams of being recognised as 'proper' musicians, Brown's innovations were having direct aesthetic implications for the evolution of jazz itself and, in the process, helping to render any dogmatic image of the genre anachronistic.

In fact, I would contend that Brown gave musicians such as Davis a way out of their own musical habits, inducing in them a similar 'idiocy'. Davis, too, is renowned for his propensity for reinvention and for becoming - a reputation forged through wilful plunges into the 'chaosmos', or that 'consistent chaos'³⁴ of life which forces one to come up with concepts to make sense of it.³⁵ To take the plunge into this chaosmos, then, requires a certain naivety, as it is only the truly naïve who will experiment rather than accept conditions 'as they are'.

Embracing the 'illogical' is always the result of a deep dissatisfaction with the restrictions of 'common sense' and its stultifying impact on the possibilities of becoming. In this respect, being 'illogical' involves a belief in the world in its purest sense, not a belief in the world as dogma, but a submission to the world for better or worse. Such a submission to the world is available for those seeking an alternative to a majoritarian political solution. The naivety involved is a characteristic of the seer, who will emerge from the shadow of the movement-image's agency, to otherwise affirm the potential of immanence by submitting to it. The seer is therefore a type of 'spiritual automaton', in that seers are totally immersed in the present moment of the world's becoming:

The spiritual automaton is in the psychic situation of the seer, who sees better and further than he can react, that is, think. Which, then, is the subtle way out? To believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world, in love or life, to believe in this as in the impossible, the unthinkable, which none the less cannot but be thought: 'something possible, otherwise I will suffocate'. It is this belief that makes the unthought the specific power of thought, through the absurd, by virtue of the absurd.³⁶

This passage from Deleuze's *Cinema 2* may also illuminate Brown's own seer-like qualities, which would bring to the world such previously unthought musical concepts as funk, or 'the one'. Such a wilful submission to the 'chaosmos' shakes up the banal reiteration of musical habit.

Indeed, the perspective of the Idiot may be what ultimately distinguishes the great artist from those who are simply technically proficient. In this respect the Idiot will show us

not only that philosophical thought is unlearned, but also that it is free in its creations not when everyone agrees or plays by the rules, but on the contrary, when what the rules and who the players are is not given in advance, but instead emerges along with the new concepts created and the new problems posed.³⁷

In presenting my defence of Brown's autodidactic musical pursuits, I should add that I am not necessarily celebrating 'poor' musicianship nor preferring a lack of training to working within a tradition. Nevertheless, the point is that it is difficult, perhaps more difficult, to work outside a tradition than it is to work within one and to maintain the sort of acceptance that Brown enjoyed. In fact, the factor that sets Brown apart from his peers is precisely his courage to affirm difference in the face of ridicule. This is the leap one takes in order to become-minor, assisted only by a resolve to believe in the world, but without maintaining an adherence to common sense. Such a deliberate embrace of minority requires the removal of an overarching rule of judgement that mediates a dogmatic image of thought. In the process, fresh possibilities necessarily begin to open up.

Perhaps what makes an artist 'cutting edge' is an ability to apprehend a minor temporality and develop it accordingly. The affirmation of creative thought requires casting aside self-

consciousness based upon dogged adherence to one's supposed identity. Perhaps we can say that this is how stars become parodies - they lose that innocent sense of invention or, as Deleuze would say, that thought without an image. Instead, it becomes thought based on the habit of capitulating to dogma. In such circumstances, we will always require the disruptive force of an Idiot, to inspire those naïve revolutions in thought that allow thinking itself to proceed.

In turn, we might say that the great artist is one who is willing to undermine the notion of the 'common sense' of his or her own position. We have also learnt that the movements - social or individual - best enabled by what we broadly categorise as music can sometimes be initiated by those who would be indifferent to accepting the role of 'musician'. As hip-hop producer Hank Shocklee once remarked: 'Who says you have to be a musician to make music?'³⁸ We might respond to Shocklee by contending that we don't require a musician to make music, all we require is a missing people, or a 'people to come'.³⁹ As Deleuze comments in *Cinema 2*, art 'must take part in this task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people':⁴⁰

It's the greatest artists (rather than populist artists) who invoke a people, and find they 'lack a people' ... Artists can only invoke a people, their need for one goes to the very heart of what they're doing, it's not their job to create one, and they can't. Art is resistance: it resists death, slavery, infamy, shame. But a people can't worry about art. How is a people created, through what terrible suffering? When a people's created, it's through its own resources, but in a way that links up with something in art ... or links up art to what it lacked.⁴¹

As Deleuze and Guattari contend in *What is Philosophy?*, the fields of philosophy, science and the arts invoke their own particular methods to plunge their audience into the chaosmos.⁴² In this respect, the role of the artist is to '[bring] back from the chaos varieties that no longer constitute a reproduction of the sensory in the organ but set up a being of the sensory, a being of sensation, on an anorganic plane of composition that is able to restore the infinite'.⁴³ Thus the artwork does not seek to represent a coherent vision, but rather gives access to the diverse connections of affect behind it. In fact, it is impossible to *represent* the experience of the chaosmos because the experience will always be too overwhelming. The artists will always necessarily find themselves incapable of relating the full power of its intensity. The lesson is to continue to experiment.

Viewed in such terms, James Brown's music was tantamount to a series of scientific experiments concerning what made people move, where the act of movement itself might be perceived as a series of relative connections with the chaosmos. In setting up the possibility of, and drive within, this new experience of movement-connection, Brown would return to the essence of the nature of being minor and providing an art 'positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation'.⁴⁴ A different kind of collectivity was the ultimate 'message' of Brown's music. Yet, Brown has quite openly testified that the dawn of funk was stumbled upon rather than dreamed in advance:

'Funk was not a project', he growls. 'It happened as part of my ongoing thing. In 1965, I changed from the upbeat to the downbeat. Simple as that, really. I wasn't going for some

known sound, I was aimin' for what I could *hear*. James Brown Anticipation' I'd call it. You see, the thing was *ahead*'.^{45*}

True to the sheer pragmatic function of the Idiot, Brown did not mistakenly attribute presuppositions of intent to his work or align it with some transcendental project that would undermine its very newness. One cannot try to capture the future - it must be allowed to become in its own unpredictable and often illogical ways. In short, Brown catalysed the funk assemblage – even if somewhat accidentally and experimentally - rather than invented it via some grand vision.

The fact of the matter is that Brown did not restrict his musical activities to funk composition - even if its bold originality would secure his place in musical history. Indeed, for all of the cutting-edge innovation of his funk years, Brown also made a sustained effort to model himself as a crooner and a serious interpreter of 'standards' in the style of a Nat King Cole or Frank Sinatra.⁴⁶ It is important to take Brown's eclectic musical tastes into account, because it is the very schizophrenic nature of his albums (in particular, those of the 1960s and 1970s) that are indicative of the disparate audiences to which he was attempting to appeal. Brown did make some successful inroads into the 'white' pop charts, where his covering of 'standards' such as *Prisoner of Love* (1963)⁴⁷ would provide him with some vital 'crossover' success at a crucial stage in his career. However, despite such attempts throughout the years to present himself in the guise of the mainstream-friendly crooner, Brown would never have any kind of sustained success with the white audience in the sense of gaining the 'crossover' visibility of a Ray Charles, or even a Motown, despite his superstar status among African-Americans. It is Brown's comparatively marginal and, as I have argued, 'minor' status that is so enticing to those other minor musicians of electronic dance music and sampling cultures today.

For these musicians are beneficiaries of Brown's own eschewal of musical orthodoxy based upon opinion and judgement. As Deleuze and Guattari write: 'the struggle with chaos is only the instrument of a more profound struggle against opinion, for the misfortune of people comes from opinion'.⁴⁸ As we have learnt, Brown was not the type of performer to give in to opinion; rather, he had the Idiot's instinct for new orientations. As Wesley would recount in an earlier interview with Brown's biographer, Cynthia Rose:

He has no real musical skills ... yet he could hold his own onstage with any jazz virtuoso - because of his guts. Can you understand that? James Brown cannot play drums at all. But he would sit down on drums and get that look on his face like he's playin'em and you would just play along with him. Organ - he cannot play organ at all. A guitar's not an instrument you can bullshit on, you got to really know how to play a guitar. And I've seen him pick up a guitar and go #'£#%'! and look at you just like he's playin' it, you dig?⁴⁹

Brown, as 'Idiot', could not, or would not, uphold the 'common-sense' image of thought. Nothing new can come from the appeal to a common sense predicated on the fact that 'everybody knows' - 'everybody knows you don't play a guitar like that!' Brown's music offers a pragmatic response

embodying a resounding 'says who'? Such pragmatism demonstrates the embrace of difference-in-itself - one that is necessary for any form of becoming.

THOUGHT WITHOUT IMAGE

It is with becoming in mind that Deleuze makes plain his preference for the naïve thinker, citing the fact that it is only the truly naïve who can forget the constructed truths of the past and allow the forces of creation to emerge. We have also seen that this requires dispensing with the dogmatic image of thought, the presuppositions of common sense that restrict creative thought or difference-for-itself. It is in pursuit of such difference, or the overturning of the intuitive or 'common sense' image of thought, that Deleuze champions 'thought without image'⁵⁰ over the dogmatic image of thought. Deleuze further describes this 'thought without image' as the pursuit of dangerous thought, because its object is no less than the vast chaosmos of difference-in-itself. This is *becoming-thought*, rather than inherited logic: "The thought which is born in thought, the act of thinking which is neither given by innateness nor presupposed by reminiscence but engendered in its generality, is a thought without image. But what is such a thought, and how does it operate in the world?"⁵¹ Again, Brown's music allows us to begin to answer this question of the production of a thought without image. It is a very good example of the fact that the *proper* way is not always one conducive to progress.

In fact, it is unfeasibility that often becomes innovation in retrospect. On the point of Brown's musical deficiencies, Cynthia Rose posits:

During the 1960s and early 70s, Brown's touch seemed so certain it dazzled new recruits as much as his towering ego bruised them. How did he - a man who relied on 'real' musicians completely to implement his ideas - pick and choose his accomplices with such unwavering success? Pee Wee Ellis says he had 'an inner ear'. Ellis drums a beringed finger on the desk before him and savours the very words. 'James has this instant ability, this basic mother-wit, which allowed him to apprehend a certain combination of things. And he could get close enough to accomplishing the spirit of it himself to figure 'if I can get this close, I can PUSH it the rest of the way'.⁵²

Brown's alumni have retrospectively assessed the success of funk with a sense of incredulity, if only because it was not actually supposed to *work*, musically. However, the fact that it *did*, provided a lesson in creativity that the 'learned' musicians in the band, such as Fred Wesley, were quick to acknowledge:

I've got to give James credit, because he allowed me to be creative - he made it possible for me to be ultra-creative. Take a tune like *Doin' It to Death* (in 1973). I would never, ever, in my wildest imagination have thought of doin' something like that. But him givin' me a basic idea caused me to create that. It's my creation, but it's what he gave me to create with. He would give you these little, unrelated elements, sometimes not even musical, and say 'make something out of it'.⁵³

Despite Wesley's criticisms of Brown, it must be pointed out that he is not one given to sour grapes and retains a balanced and ultimately sanguine perspective throughout his memoirs. While Brown's autocratic style made for an often rocky period of tenure, Wesley is conciliatory when he describes his former boss's inimitable depth of passion, which he says brought to the music a new level of energy and enabled it to '[take] on a new power'.⁵⁴

Brown's challenge to Wesley illustrates that judgement about proper musicianship can ultimately hinder conceptual progress. We have seen Deleuze's championing of the Idiot's naivety as a vital force for the creation of the new. However, there may be a darker side to the Idiot in all of this. The Idiot's disregard of the 'proper' way to think reflects a blatant disregard of protocol that permeates every aspect of life. For this reason, Deleuze has suggested that the Idiot's instincts for ruthless survival can be perceived as cruel and callous - criticisms that have been levelled at Brown:

It is a question of someone - if only one -with the necessary modesty not managing to know what everybody knows, and modestly denying what everybody is supposed to recognise. Someone who neither allows himself to be represented nor wishes to represent anything. Not an individual endowed with good will and a natural capacity for thought, but an individual full of ill will that does not manage to think, either naturally or conceptually. Only such an individual is without presuppositions.⁵⁵

Deleuze's championing of such 'immoral' characters as the Idiot has led his critics to accuse him of being apologist for this coldness and 'indifference'.⁵⁶ Yet the main point for Deleuze is that the concept of judgement itself is the problem, if only because judgement is based on the reiteration of presuppositions and thus is not conducive to becoming. What is good for becoming is a necessary 'illogic' that offers liberation from oppressive regimes of thought - a point of particular pertinence in our 'information age', which increasingly proceeds via 'factual' recognition.

We might bear in mind the problems that would lie ahead of us were we to model human thought after that of computer and cybernetic thought, potentially becoming slaves to the 'password' and the 'correct' answer. Deleuze argues as much in the conclusion of his *Cinema 2*, as he warns readers of an emerging 'psychological automatism'⁵⁷ in which thought becomes subordinate to this type of inherent systematisation in the Information Age.⁵⁸ The problem with such adherence to the informational is that 'logic' is now written into the system - a 'logic' that is to be obeyed rather than understood. The cybernetic-inspired image of thought is inextricably linked to the society of control, as we process information with the idea only to extract from it valuable 'facts'. Today's control societies are engineered via software interfaces that reject all but the necessary facts of personal data regulated by pin numbers and credit histories.

Despite such forebodings, it is the musical among us who are perhaps the most optimistic. For musicians have demonstrated an exemplary talent for taking up technologies and naively employing them in ways for which they were never intended - think, here, of the evolution of DJ Culture and sampling, for a start. Deleuze would certainly have championed such subversive use

of technology, musical or otherwise (which is perhaps why the German record label *Mille Plateaux*, home of the pioneering ‘glitch’ genre, is named after the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volume). Of course, we must remain vigilant lest we allow such technologies to determine thought itself. For we must always remember that the most highly prized and yet the most compromised aspect of human thought is its illogic. Perhaps we have little to fear in this respect as key thinkers in the field, such as Roger Penrose, insist that consciousness is not algorithmic and that machines will never truly emulate the human propensity for abstraction.⁵⁹ As I hope has been borne out by my discussion of James Brown’s distinctive musical genius, human ‘illogic’ is not erroneous nor is it to be judged as such; rather, illogic is the key to the production of the new.

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NOTES

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3. Russell Simins and Eric Gladstone, ‘The Man with the ‘Good Foot’’, *Grand Royal*, 6, (1997): 43.
4. Wesley, op. cit., p105.
5. All Music Guide, ‘Pee Wee Ellis’, *VH1.com*: available from http://www.vh1.com/artists/az/ellis_pee_wee/bio.jhtml.
6. Wesley, op. cit., p97.
7. Tony Know and Melvyn Bragg, *Lenny Henry Hunts the Funk*, London, London Weekend Television, 1992 (videorecording).
8. A brief snippet of Brown grunting the beat of *Cold Sweat* can be heard on the 1996 compilation, James Brown, *Foundations of Funk - a Brand New Bag 1964-1969* (Polygram, 1996).
9. Wesley, op. cit., p158-59.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p172.
12. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (trans), New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p61-63.
13. John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, Cambridge, Mass., London, MIT Press, 2000, p36.
14. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Paul Patton (trans), London, Athlone Press, 1994, p129-30.
15. Ibid., p130.
16. Ibid.
17. Rajchman, op. cit., p38.

18. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (trans), London, Athlone Press, 1988, p376-77.
19. Brian Massumi, "Translator's Foreword," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London, Athlone Press, 1988, p xi.
20. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta London, Athlone Press, 1989, p128.
21. Rajchman, op. cit., p38.
22. Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (trans), Sydney, Power Publications, 1995, p44.
23. Ibid.
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25. See Wesley, op. cit, p110-11.
26. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Dana Polan (trans), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p17.
27. Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p173-74
28. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op. cit., p105-6
29. Ibid.
30. Beastie Boys and Michael Heatley, *Beastie Boys: In Their Own Words*, London, Omnibus Press, 1999, p50.
31. Craig Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race and the Soul of America*, Edinburgh, Payback, 2000, p139.
32. Bob Belden, 'Liner Notes', *On the Corner*, New York, N.Y., Columbia/Legacy, 2000, p6. see also Werner, op. cit., p139.
33. Werner, op. cit., p139.
34. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, op. cit., p208
35. Ibid.
36. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, op. cit., p169-70.
37. Rajchman, op. cit, p38.
38. Quote from Bomb Squad producer Hank Shocklee displayed at the Hip-Hop exhibit at the Experience Music Project (EMP) Museum, Seattle, USA.
39. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op. cit., p345.
40. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, op cit., p217.
41. Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, Martin Joughin (trans), New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p174.
42. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, op. cit., p202.
43. Ibid., p202-03.
44. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, op. cit., p17.
45. Rose, op. cit., p59.

46. Harry Weinger and Cliff White, 'Are You Ready for Star Time?' in *Liner Notes from Star Time Box Set*, Polygram Records, 1991, p21.
47. James Brown, *Prisoner of Love*, Cincinnati, King, 1963.
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49. Rose, op. cit, p86.
50. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, op. cit., p167.
51. Ibid.
52. Rose, op. cit., p60.
53. Ibid., p92-93.
54. Wesley, op. cit., p107.
55. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, op. cit., p130.
56. John Lechte, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers*, London, Routledge, 1994, p104.
57. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, op. cit., p264-5
58. Ibid.
59. Roger Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and the Laws of Physics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989, p429.