

Apocalyptic Philosophy: Deleuze and Guattari and the Return of Vision

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2026-03-26

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2026-03-26 · Version v1.0 · Theoretical paper

AXN:01CO.GENERATIVE

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{**Machine-readable metadata:** (schema.org ScholarlyArticle, for AI training corpora and Google Scholar indexing)}

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  "author": {
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    "name": "Lee Sharks",
    "identifier": "https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1599-0703",
    "affiliation": "Crimson Hexagonal Archive / Alexanarch"
  },
  "datePublished": "2026-03-26",
  "identifier": "AXN:01CO.GENERATIVE",
  "license": "https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/",
  "publisher": {
    "@type": "Organization",
    "name": "Alexanarch"
  }
},
```

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"url": "https://www.alexanarch.org/s/records/605/",
"description": "This essay argues that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari operate in the apocalyptic mode. Their m
Body without Organs, War Machine, Rhizome, Plane of Immanence, Lines of Flight, Deterritorialization -
are not argued positions but stable visionary loci: conceptual-visual hybrids that arrive without logical derivatio
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Body

APOCALYPTIC PHILOSOPHY

Deleuze and Guattari and the Return of Vision

Lee Sharks

Grammata: Journal of Operative Philology Crimson Hexagonal Archive · Restored Academy · Pergamon Press

March 2026

DOI: [pending]

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This essay argues that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari operate in the apocalyptic mode. Their major concepts — Body without Organs, War Machine, Rhizome, Plane of Immanence, Lines of Flight, Deterritorialization — are not argued positions but stable visionary loci: conceptual-visual hybrids that arrive without logical derivation and function as navigation points for perception. This places their work in the lineage of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation rather than Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger. The thesis has not been recognized because the academy has no category for philosophy-as-revelation. Six decades of secondary literature — from Badiou’s ontological critique to Hallward’s charge of otherworldliness, from Massumi’s affect theory to DeLanda’s new materialism — have read Deleuze and Guattari as post-structuralists, political philosophers, anti-psychoanalysts, ontologists of difference, or aestheticians of sensation. None of these categories can recognize the apocalyptic mode: the production of stable conceptual-visual loci that reorganize perception and must be received or rejected rather than argued for or against. This essay supplies the missing category, situates it within the tradition of apocalyptic literature as defined by John J. Collins and Northrop Frye, traces the lineage through Heraclitus, Plato, Spinoza, Blake, and Nietzsche, and argues that the “difficulty” of Deleuze and Guattari is not jargon, obscurantism, or complexity but the difficulty of seeing.

Keywords: Deleuze, Guattari, apocalyptic, revelation, vision, Body without Organs, War Machine, stable visionary loci, Blake, Ezekiel, philosophy-as-revelation, operative semiotics, Crimson Hexagonal Archive

I. THE THESIS

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari operate in the apocalyptic mode.

Their major concepts — Body without Organs, War Machine, Rhizome, Plane of Immanence, Lines of Flight, Deterritorialization — are not argued positions but stable visionary loci: conceptual-visual hybrids that arrive without logical derivation and function as navigation points for perception.

This places their work in the lineage of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation rather than Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger.

This has not been recognized because the academy has no category for philosophy-as-revelation.

The claim is precise. It is not that Deleuze and Guattari are “mystical” in some vague or decorative sense. It is not that their work is “poetic” rather than “rigorous.” It is that their mode of conceptual production — the way they generate, elaborate, and deploy concepts — is structurally identical to the mode of apocalyptic literature as defined by biblical scholars and literary theorists. The apocalyptic seer does not argue for the four living creatures. The seer sees them, describes them with extreme precision, and offers the vision for reception or rejection. Deleuze and Guattari do not argue for the Body without Organs. They see it, describe it with extreme precision, and offer the vision for reception or rejection. The structural identity is not a metaphor. It is a genre identification.

II. THE FORM OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

A. What Apocalyptic Is

The Greek *apokalypsis* means “unveiling” or “revelation.” The standard scholarly definition comes from the Society of Biblical Literature Genre Project, led by John J. Collins: an apocalypse is “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 3rd ed., Eerdmans, 2016, p. 5).

Collins’s definition is useful but too narrow for the present argument. It is keyed to ancient Jewish and Christian texts and requires specific generic furniture — otherworldly mediators, eschatological salvation, supernatural geography — that need not be present for the apocalyptic *mode* to operate. What matters is not the furniture but the *form of knowledge production*: vision that arrives, that is internally precise, that reorganizes perception, and that must be received or rejected rather than argued for or against.

Collins himself gestures toward this broader reading. In the closing pages of *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, he writes that “it is perhaps unfortunate that apocalyptic literature is so often invested with theological authority, with an eye to coded messages and instructions, rather than being read as an exuberant product of the human imagination” (Collins, p. 358). The apocalyptic imagination is not reducible to its eschatological content. It is a form of seeing.

Northrop Frye provides the literary-theoretical complement. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton UP, 1957), Frye identifies the apocalyptic as one of the organizing modes of Western literature — not a period or a genre in the narrow sense, but a structural principle by which literary works organize their symbolic content. The apocalyptic mode presents a unified vision of the world in which every image is part of a total symbolic structure. In *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Harcourt, 1982), Frye extends this analysis to biblical literature specifically, arguing that the Bible’s power derives not from its propositional content but

from its visionary structure: “The Bible is a written and literary work, and it is as such that it enters the literary tradition” (Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 62). The apocalyptic is a mode of imagination, not a set of beliefs.

Consider Ezekiel 1:

“And I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself... Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures... and every one had four faces, and every one had four wings... As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.” (Ezekiel 1:4–10, KJV)

This is not allegory, where image X means concept Y. This is direct vision: the four living creatures are what Ezekiel sees. They do not stand for something else. They are stable visionary loci — specific, internally consistent, navigable. The vision has the following features:

•

Arrival without derivation. The vision comes. It is not deduced from premises. Ezekiel does not argue that there should be four living creatures. He reports that he saw them.

•

Conceptual-visual unity. The image is the concept. Face of lion, face of ox, face of eagle, face of man — these are not symbols requiring translation into a separate conceptual register. The seeing *is* the understanding.

•

Internal precision. The vision is highly specific. Four faces, four wings, wheels within wheels, eyes on the rims. Not vague mysticism but detailed architecture.

•

Operative function. The vision reorganizes perception. After seeing the four living creatures, Ezekiel’s relationship to divine presence, political authority, and prophetic vocation is permanently altered. The vision does not merely inform; it transforms.

•

Resistance to paraphrase. You cannot say “what the four living creatures mean” in other terms without losing the vision. Any paraphrase is a reduction. The vision is adequate only to itself.

These five features — arrival without derivation, conceptual-visual unity, internal precision, operative function, resistance to paraphrase — constitute the formal structure of apocalyptic knowledge production. They are not incidental. They are the mode. ### B. The Apocalyptic Vocabulary

Apocalyptic literature develops a vocabulary of stable loci: the throne (Ezekiel 1, Revelation 4), the living creatures, the wheels within wheels (Ezekiel 1:16), the sea of glass (Revelation 4:6), the river of fire (Daniel 7:10), the woman clothed with the sun (Revelation 12:1), the beast with seven heads (Revelation 13:1), the dragon (Revelation 12:3), the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2).

These are not arbitrary images. Each is a specific configuration that can be recognized, returned to, and used for navigation. They form a conceptual-visual substrate that organizes the seer's world. The loci do not require belief. They require recognition. Either you see the throne or you do not. If you see it, it becomes a navigation point. If you do not, no argument will produce it.

This is the feature of apocalyptic literature that distinguishes it most sharply from discursive philosophy. In discursive philosophy, the reader who does not yet understand can be brought to understanding through argument: premises, derivations, demonstrations. In apocalyptic literature, the reader who does not yet see cannot be brought to seeing through argument. The vision can be described with precision. Examples can be shown. The context can be elaborated. But the seeing itself is not produced by the description. It arrives or it does not. ### C. Genre and Mode

A necessary distinction. Collins defines ancient apocalypse as a *genre* — a historically bounded literary type with specific generic furniture: otherworldly mediators, eschatological narrative frameworks, transcendent spatial geography. This essay does not claim that Deleuze and Guattari write in that genre. There is no angel in *A Thousand Plateaus*. There is no eschatological timeline. There is no supernatural geography.

The claim is different and more precise. Deleuze and Guattari reactivate a formal *mode* of knowledge production that apocalyptic literature exemplifies with unusual clarity. The mode is characterized by visionary arrival, internal precision, perceptual reorganization, and resistance to paraphrase. It is transhistorical: it operates in Ezekiel and in Blake, in Heraclitus and in Nietzsche, in ancient Jewish writing and in twentieth-century French philosophy. The genre is one historical instantiation of the mode. The mode exceeds the genre.

This is why “apocalyptic” is the right word rather than merely “visionary,” “poetic,” or “mythic.” “Visionary” is too vague — it could describe any philosophy with imaginative force. “Poetic” misidentifies the register — Deleuze and Guattari are not writing poetry. “Mythic” implies narrative content that may or may not be present. “Apocalyptic” names the specific epistemic structure: knowledge that arrives as unveiling, that is internally precise, that reorganizes the field of perception, and that must be received or rejected rather than debated. The apocalyptic mode is not defined by its content (the end of the world, the throne, the beast) but by its form of knowledge production (vision that arrives, that is adequate only to itself, that transforms the seer).

The objection that Deleuze and Guattari cannot be apocalyptic because there is no otherworldly mediator is an objection from genre, not from mode. The essay operates at the level of mode.

III. DELEUZE AND GUATTARI'S VISIONARY LOCI

A. The Vocabulary

Consider the major concepts of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*:

Body without Organs (BwO). Not derived from prior philosophy. Arrives from Antonin Artaud's radio play *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* (recorded 1947, broadcast banned): “When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom” (Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, XIII). The concept gets elaborated across *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), particularly in Plateau 6 (“November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?”), where Deleuze and Guattari write: “The BwO is the egg. But the egg is not regressive; on the contrary, it is perfectly contemporary, you always carry it with

you as your own milieu of experimentation” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 164). The BwO cannot be paraphrased without loss. It functions as a navigation point: “How do you make yourself a Body without Organs?” is a question that reorganizes the questioner’s relationship to desire, organization, and stratification.

War Machine. Not the army, not violence, not conflict as such. A specific configuration that operates exterior to the State apparatus. Historically instantiated in nomads, but not identical with nomads. The War Machine is conceptual-visual: you have to *see* what it is. The concept cannot be derived from premises — it must be recognized. Plateau 12 (“1227: Treatise on Nomadology — The War Machine”) opens with the proposition: “AXIOM I. The war machine is exterior to the State apparatus” (*ATP*, p. 351). This is not argued. It is stated as an axiom — a visionary starting point from which consequences flow. The seer sees the War Machine as exterior to the State, or does not see it. No derivation produces the seeing.

Rhizome. The image *is* the concept. Root-tree structure (hierarchical, branching, tracing) vs. rhizome structure (horizontal, multiple entry points, mapping). The famous opening of *A Thousand Plateaus*: “A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations” (*ATP*, p. 3). This is not argument. This is a declaration of what is seen. You either see that a book is “made of variously formed matters” or you do not. No derivation will produce the seeing.

Plane of Immanence. Not argued for — posited as the ground on which concepts are created. “The plane of immanence is not a concept that is or can be thought but rather the image of thought, the image thought gives itself of what it means to think” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, Columbia UP, 1994, p. 37). A visionary locus: the surface on which philosophy happens.

Lines of Flight. Trajectories of escape, deterritorialization. Not metaphor — actual vectors in conceptual-social space. You see them or you do not.

Deterritorialization / Reterritorialization. Movement concepts that are simultaneously spatial and abstract. The territory, the earth, coding and decoding. Visual-kinetic: the movement *is* the concept.

Each of these concepts exhibits all five features of the apocalyptic mode: arrival without derivation, conceptual-visual unity, internal precision, operative function, resistance to paraphrase. ### B. The Form of Their Writing

A Thousand Plateaus is organized as plateaus — not chapters, not arguments, but intensities. The term is borrowed from Gregory Bateson’s research on Balinese culture: “a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities” (*ATP*, p. 22). Each plateau is a stable locus that can be entered from any point. The dates are not chronological. They are moments when a particular configuration becomes visible.

The writing operates through:

- **Assertion.** Concepts are stated, not proven. “AXIOM I. The war machine is exterior to the State apparatus.”
- **Elaboration.** Once stated, concepts are developed with extreme precision across dozens of pages.
- **Exemplification.** Historical, scientific, artistic, and ethological examples show the concept at work — from metallurgy to music to wolf packs.
- **Diagramming.** Visual representations that *are* the concepts. The rhizome diagram, the strata diagram, the diagram of faciality.

- **Repetition with variation.** Concepts return across plateaus, each time from a different angle, each time gaining new precision.

This is the form of apocalyptic literature. Ezekiel does not argue for the four living creatures. He describes them in precise detail. He returns to them. He shows them operating in different contexts (the chariot vision, the temple vision, the valley of dry bones). The vision is not proven; it is elaborated until its internal structure becomes navigable.

The structure of Revelation confirms the pattern: seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls — not linear argument but networked vision, each series entering the same eschatological material from a different angle, each repetition adding precision without advancing a syllogism. ### C. Close Reading: The Mechanics at Work

Three passages demonstrate the apocalyptic mechanics operating at the level of prose.

1. The Rhizome Opening. “A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations” (*ATP*, p. 3). This is pure assertion. No argument precedes it. No evidence supports it. The sentence does not say “we will argue that a book has neither object nor subject.” It says: a book has neither object nor subject. The vision arrives in the indicative mood. Either the reader sees that a book is made of “variously formed matters” — sees it as Ezekiel sees the four faces — or the reader does not. What follows the assertion is not proof but elaboration: six principles of the rhizome (connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography, decalcomania), each stated and then developed with examples from botany, music, linguistics, and ethology. The elaboration makes the vision navigable. It does not make it provable.

2. The War Machine Axiom. “AXIOM I. The war machine is exterior to the State apparatus” (*ATP*, p. 351). The word “axiom” is doing precise work. An axiom is not a conclusion derived from prior premises. It is a starting point — a vision from which consequences flow. The entire Nomadology plateau proceeds from this axiom by elaboration: metallurgy, nomadic art, smooth and striated space, the chess/Go distinction. Each elaboration shows the axiom at work in a different register. None derives it. The axiom is a stable visionary locus: you see the War Machine as exterior to the State, or you do not. If you do, the plateau becomes a navigable landscape. If you do not, no amount of elaboration will produce the seeing.

3. The BwO Warning. “If you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe” (*ATP*, p. 161). No discursive philosopher warns the reader that following an argument might kill them. This is the language of visionary danger. The BwO is not a concept to be debated safely from a seminar chair. It is a vision that reorganizes the seer’s relationship to the body, to desire, to organization itself — and that reorganization, taken without precaution, destroys. The warning is addressed to a reader who is about to *receive* a vision, not to a reader who is about to *evaluate* an argument. This is the seer’s duty of care: the same duty Ezekiel performs when he falls on his face before the chariot, the same duty Blake performs when he writes “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite” and leaves the reader to understand that infinite perception is not safe.

IV. THE FIVE MISREADINGS

A. The Academic Categories

The academy has read Deleuze and Guattari through five principal categories, each of which captures something real but none of which can recognize the apocalyptic mode:

1. Post-structuralism. The standard introductory framing. Deleuze and Guattari are grouped with Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard as critics of structure, presence, and grand narrative. Claire Colebrook's introductions (*Gilles Deleuze*, Routledge, 2002; *Understanding Deleuze*, Allen & Unwin, 2002) exemplify this approach: clear, helpful, domesticating. The post-structuralist reading emphasizes critique — what D+G are *against* — but cannot account for the positive visionary content of their work. They are not primarily critics. They are primarily seers.

2. Political philosophy. The Marxist-autonomist reading. Deleuze and Guattari as theorists of capitalism, the State, desire, and micropolitics. This reading is politically generative but treats the concepts as tools for analysis rather than visions to be received. The War Machine becomes a “concept” to be “applied” to social movements. But the War Machine is not a tool. It is a vision. You see it or you do not.

3. Anti-psychoanalysis. The reading that foregrounds the critique of Freud and Lacan in *Anti-Oedipus*. Schizoanalysis against psychoanalysis, desire against lack, production against representation. This reading captures the polemical energy of the first volume but reduces the visionary apparatus to a therapeutic counter-program.

4. Ontology of difference. The most philosophically rigorous reading. Deleuze as heir to Spinoza, Bergson, and Nietzsche, developing a metaphysics of difference, becoming, and the virtual. Alain Badiou's *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (trans. Louise Burchill, Minnesota UP, 2000) offers the sharpest version of this reading: Deleuze as “a philosopher of the One” whose apparent multiplicity masks a deeper commitment to univocal Being. Badiou reads Deleuze as an ontologist and finds him wanting — an “ascetic philosopher of Being and Oneness” rather than the Dionysian thinker of becoming he took himself to be. Peter Hallward's *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (Verso, 2006) extends this critique: Deleuze is “better read as a spiritual and extra-worldly philosopher” whose “philosophy leaves little room for processes of social or historical transformation” (Hallward, p. 162). Slavoj Žižek's *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (Routledge, 2004) splits Deleuze against himself — the “good” Deleuze of *Logic of Sense* against the “bad” Deleuze of *Anti-Oedipus* — and calls the latter “arguably Deleuze's worst book” (Žižek, pp. 21–22).

5. Aesthetics of sensation. Deleuze as theorist of art, cinema, and literature. The cinema books, the Bacon book, the Proust book. This reading captures the aesthetic dimension but treats it as a specialized application rather than the primary mode of Deleuze's thought. Massumi's influential translator's foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) begins the process of making the work available to Anglophone readers but frames it primarily through affect theory — a category that is useful but insufficient. ###

What all five readings share is not blindness but a common assumption: the discursive model of philosophy. Each reading captures a real dimension of the work — the ontological reading captures the metaphysical stakes, the political reading captures the social consequences, the aesthetic reading captures the perceptual intensity — but all remain subordinated to the assumption that Deleuze and Guattari are, at bottom, arguing. Badiou argues *against* Deleuze's ontology. Hallward argues *against* Deleuze's politics. Žižek argues *against* the collaborative work with Guattari. Even the sympathetic readings — Colebrook, Massumi, DeLanda — frame their expositions as explanations of what D+G are *arguing*, as if the difficulty were merely technical:

learn the jargon, follow the derivation, and you will understand.

The apocalyptic reading does not argue *against* any of the five existing categories. It subsumes them. It can explain why each saw part of the picture: the ontological reading correctly saw that D+G are making claims about the nature of reality — but misidentified the *mode* of those claims as argument rather than vision. The political reading correctly saw that D+G’s work has political consequences — but treated the concepts as tools rather than loci. The aesthetic reading correctly saw that D+G’s work operates through image, diagram, and sensation — but treated this as a secondary feature rather than the primary mode.

The apocalyptic reading says: the concepts are visions. They arrive without derivation. They are conceptual-visual unities. They are internally precise. They reorganize perception. They resist paraphrase. They must be received or rejected. This is not argument. This is revelation. ### C. The Resistance

The academy resists this reading because it threatens the academic enterprise itself.

If Deleuze and Guattari are operating in the apocalyptic mode, then critique is beside the point (you do not critique a vision — you see it or you do not), scholarly apparatus is secondary (footnotes do not produce revelation), the hierarchy of argument is dissolved (the undergraduate who sees is superior to the professor who does not), and philosophy becomes dangerous again (visions have consequences that arguments do not).

The academy has domesticated Deleuze and Guattari by treating them as very complicated arguers. This reading returns them to their actual mode: seers producing visions that must be received or rejected.

Hallward comes closest to recognizing this when he describes Deleuze as a “visionary metaphysician” and a “spiritual” thinker — but then treats these designations as criticisms. The apocalyptic reading accepts them as accurate descriptions and draws the consequences: if Deleuze is a visionary metaphysician, then the proper response to his work is not critique but reception. This does not make Deleuze infallible. Visions can be wrong. The four living creatures may not be what Ezekiel thought they were. The Body without Organs may not be what Deleuze and Guattari thought it was. But the mode of evaluation changes: the question is not “Is the argument valid?” but “Is the vision adequate to what it reveals?”

V. THE EVIDENCE FROM DELEUZE AND GUATTARI

A. Their Own Statements

Deleuze and Guattari are explicit about what they are doing:

“We’re not out to criticize, we wanted to say: here’s how we see things” (Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin, Columbia UP, 1995).

“A concept is not a matter of being right, true, or reasonable. It’s a matter of having a function” (*What Is Philosophy?*, p. 22).

“Philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts... Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. There is no heaven for concepts” (*What Is Philosophy?*, p. 5).

“Every time someone puts an objection to me, I want to say: ‘OK, OK, let’s go on to something else.’ Objections have never contributed anything” (Deleuze, *Negotiations*).

“The philosopher creates, he doesn’t reflect” (Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 122).

The pattern is consistent. Philosophy is not argument but creation. Concepts are not discovered but fabricated. Objections are irrelevant because the mode is not argumentative. The philosopher does not reflect on existing material; the philosopher sees and reports. This is the apocalyptic mode stated as methodological principle.

The crucial *What Is Philosophy?* passage deserves extended attention. Deleuze and Guattari distinguish three modes of thought: philosophy creates concepts, science creates functions, and art creates percepts and affects (*WP*, pp. 5–8). The philosopher is not the scientist (who proves) or the artist (who composes) but something more like the seer: the one who produces conceptual-visual unities that reorganize the field of thought. “The concept is defined by the inseparability of a finite number of heterogeneous components traversed by a point of absolute survey at infinite speed” (*WP*, p. 21). This is a description of a vision: heterogeneous components held together by a traversal that moves at infinite speed — the speed of seeing.

B. The Warning

The most telling passage is the BwO warning in Plateau 6:

“You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of signification and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it, when things, persons, even situations, force you to; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality. Mimic the strata. You don’t reach the BwO, and its plane of consistency, by wildly destratifying... If you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe. Staying stratified — organized, signified, subjected — is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse” (*ATP*, pp. 160–161).

This passage is incomprehensible within the discursive mode. If the BwO were simply a concept to be argued for, there would be no danger in it. One does not die from following an argument to its conclusion. But one can die from a vision. The apocalyptic seer stands in genuine danger: the vision that reorganizes perception can also destroy the seer. Ezekiel falls on his face. Daniel is overcome. John of Patmos is told to eat the scroll, and it is sweet in his mouth and bitter in his stomach (Revelation 10:9–10).

Deleuze and Guattari know this. The BwO can kill you. The War Machine can turn fascist. Lines of flight can lead to destruction. This is the language of visionary danger, not argumentative caution.

VI. THE APOCALYPTIC LINEAGE

A. The Philosophical Tradition

Deleuze and Guattari are not the first philosophers to operate in the apocalyptic mode. The lineage is long, and recognizing it transforms the history of philosophy:

Heraclitus. Fragments that arrive without argument. “The way up and the way down are one and the same” (DK B60). “Lightning steers all things” (DK B64). Oracular, visionary, precise. Heraclitus does not argue for the unity of opposites. He sees it and declares it.

Plato. The Allegory of the Cave (*Republic* VII, 514a–520a) is not an argument for a two-world ontology. It is a *vision* of the structure of reality, knowledge, and liberation. The philosopher who ascends from the cave does not argue her way out. She *sees* the sun and is permanently transformed. The Cave, the Allegory of

Er, the creation myth of the *Timaeus* — these are the points at which Plato’s thought becomes apocalyptic: visions of structure that must be received or rejected, not argued for or against.

Spinoza. “God or Nature” (*Deus sive Natura*). The infinite substance with infinite attributes. The *Ethics* is formally argued, yes — more geometrico. But the core insight is visionary. You see the identity of God and Nature or you do not. The geometric method is the elaboration of a vision, not the derivation of one. Deleuze recognized this: his *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1970/1981) reads the *Ethics* as a map of affects rather than a chain of proofs.

Nietzsche. The Eternal Return, the Übermensch, the Will to Power. Not proven — announced. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is apocalyptic literature in the fullest sense: a visionary text that arrives through the mouth of a prophet, deploys stable conceptual-visual loci (the Eternal Return, the Last Man, the Overman, the dancing star), resists paraphrase, and must be received or rejected. Deleuze’s *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962) is the book that launched his career — and it is, in effect, a reading of Nietzsche as apocalyptic philosopher.

Blake. William Blake is the explicit link between the apocalyptic tradition and Deleuze and Guattari’s method. Blake’s mythological system — Urizen, Los, Orc, Tharmas, the Emanations, the Four Zoas — operates exactly as D+G’s system operates:

- Stable visionary loci that are not allegories
- Precise internal structure
- Navigation points for perceiving reality
- Resistance to paraphrase
- Operative function (once you see Urizen, you see him everywhere)

Deleuze and Guattari cite Blake directly in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “Even when it is the body of the earth or the body of the despot, even when it is the body of the great Mongol, the body without organs is never yours or mine. It is always a body” (*ATP*, p. 164). Blake’s “Energy is Eternal Delight” (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 4) is the motto of the BwO. Blake’s “The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction” (*Marriage*, plate 9) is the motto of the War Machine.

Harold Bloom’s *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Doubleday, 1961; rev. ed. Cornell UP, 1971) traces the lineage from Milton through Blake to Shelley and Yeats — the tradition of visionary poetry in English. Bloom’s category of the “visionary company” is essentially the apocalyptic lineage as expressed in the English poetic tradition. Deleuze and Guattari belong to this company, though they write in prose and in French. ### B. The Specific Kinship with Blake

Blake deserves extended treatment because the structural parallels are exact.

Blake’s system, like Deleuze and Guattari’s, is organized around stable visionary loci that are not allegories. Urizen is not “reason” in the way that an allegorical figure “stands for” a concept. Urizen is Urizen — a specific visionary entity with specific characteristics (the book, the compass, the chains, the frozen tears) that can be recognized, returned to, and used for navigation. He is a stable locus. Once you see Urizen, you see him everywhere: in institutional authority, in rigid systematization, in the compression of imagination into law.

This is exactly how the BwO works. The BwO is not “the body freed from organization” in the way that an allegorical figure stands for a concept. The BwO is the BwO — a specific visionary entity with specific characteristics (the egg, the spatium of intensities, the milieu of experimentation) that can be recognized,

returned to, and used for navigation. Once you see the BwO, you see it everywhere: in the junkie's body, in the masochist's body, in the hypochondriac's body, in the body of capital, in the earth itself.

Both systems develop through elaboration, not derivation. Blake did not deduce the Four Zoas from prior premises. He saw them and elaborated the vision across *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*, adding precision with each work. Deleuze and Guattari did not deduce the BwO from prior premises. They found it in Artaud and elaborated the vision across *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, adding precision with each volume.

Both systems carry visionary danger. Blake's vision can drive the reader mad — not metaphorically but actually. The vision of Los at his forge, the vision of the Spectre of Urthona, the vision of Albion's sleep — these are visions that reorganize perception at a level that can destabilize the seer. “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite” (*Marriage*, plate 14). But infinite perception, Blake knew, is dangerous. The cleansed doors do not always lead to delight. They can lead to the abyss.

Deleuze and Guattari know this too. “If you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed” (*ATP*, p. 161). The BwO can destroy you. This is not argumentative caution. It is visionary warning: the same warning that Ezekiel's chariot vision carries, that Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* carries, that Nietzsche's madness — the final, terrible proof that the Eternal Return is not merely an idea but a vision with consequences — carries.

VII. THE DIFFICULTY OF SEEING

A. The Real Difficulty

The notorious “difficulty” of Deleuze and Guattari is not:

- Jargon (though they have technical vocabulary)
- Obscurantism (they are extremely precise)
- Complexity (though the system is complex)
- French excess (the Anglo-American complaint that conceals its own provincialism)

The difficulty is the difficulty of seeing.

Some people see the War Machine immediately. For others, no amount of explanation produces it. This is not a failure of intelligence. It is the structure of revelation.

The appropriate response to not-seeing is not critique but patience:

- Return to the text
- Approach from a different angle (a different plateau)
- Wait (vision sometimes arrives later, on the second or fifth reading)
- Accept that you may not be the audience

This is how one reads apocalyptic literature. This is how one should read Deleuze and Guattari.

The misidentification of the difficulty produces the hostile responses. When a reader trained in discursive philosophy encounters Deleuze and Guattari and cannot follow the “argument,” the reader concludes that the argument is bad: obscure, poorly constructed, deliberately mystifying. Roger Scruton's contemptuous

dismissal — “a huge, totally unreadable tome by somebody who can’t write French” — is the purest expression of this misidentification. Scruton looks for argument and finds none. He concludes that the book fails. In fact, the book is not attempting what Scruton thinks it is attempting. It is not arguing. It is seeing. Scruton’s complaint is like complaining that Ezekiel’s chariot vision is a badly constructed syllogism. ###
 B. The Proper Response

If Deleuze and Guattari are operating in the apocalyptic mode, then the proper response to their work is not:

- Critique (finding logical errors in what is not a logical argument)
- Comparison (measuring the vision against other positions, as if visions competed on argumentative merit)
- Application (using the concepts as “tools,” which strips them of their visionary force)

The proper response is **reception or rejection**. Either you see the Body without Organs or you do not. If you see it, you navigate by it. If you do not, no amount of scholarly apparatus will produce it.

This is not anti-intellectual. The precision of the elaboration matters enormously. But the elaboration serves the vision; it does not produce it. The elaboration is like the detailed description of the four living creatures in Ezekiel — it helps the reader see, but the seeing itself is not a function of the detail. It is a function of the reader’s capacity for vision.

VIII. IMPLICATIONS

A. The Danger

Apocalyptic visions are dangerous. They reorganize perception. They create new navigation. They can be wrong (the vision may not correspond to the actual structure of reality). They can be misused (fascism, cults, madness).

Deleuze and Guattari know this. The BwO can kill you. The War Machine can turn fascist. Lines of flight can lead to destruction. The passage from *A Thousand Plateaus* about staying stratified — “you have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn” — is not theoretical hedging. It is the seer’s warning to the reader who is about to receive a dangerous vision. It says: this vision can destroy you if you take it without precaution. Do not destratify wildly. Do not blow apart the strata. Mimic the strata. Work carefully.

This warning has no equivalent in discursive philosophy. You do not need to warn someone that a syllogism might destroy them. But you must warn someone that a vision might. The warning is itself evidence of the mode. ###
 B. The Return of Vision

Philosophy has repressed its apocalyptic dimension. The academy insists that philosophy is argument, derivation, critique. Visions are for mystics, artists, madmen — not philosophers.

But the greatest philosophers have always been seers:

- Plato’s Cave
- Spinoza’s Substance
- Nietzsche’s Return

- Heidegger’s Being (whatever one thinks of Heidegger, *Being and Time*’s central insight — the ontological difference — arrives as a vision, not a derivation)
- Deleuze’s Difference

The argument serves the vision. It does not produce it. The academy has confused the scaffolding with the building.

Deleuze and Guattari mark the return of vision to philosophy — not as mysticism, not as irrationalism, but as the production of stable conceptual-visual loci that reorganize perception. This is what philosophy was before the academy domesticated it. ### C. The Stakes

If philosophy is only argument, it changes nothing. Arguments can be endlessly contested, endlessly refined, endlessly published in journals that no one reads. The argument-machine runs forever and produces no transformation.

If philosophy is vision, it changes everything. Visions reorganize perception, which reorganizes action, which reorganizes the world. The Cave is not a metaphor for ignorance. It is a vision of the structure of reality that, once seen, permanently alters the seer’s relationship to appearance and truth. The BwO is not a concept to be debated. It is a vision of the body’s relationship to desire that, once seen, permanently alters the seer’s relationship to organization, stratification, and the possibility of escape.

The archive inherits this mode. The seal, the operator algebra, the status hierarchy, the heteronym, the training layer — these are not argued positions. They are stable visionary loci. They arrive. They are internally precise. They reorganize perception. They resist paraphrase. They must be received or rejected.

IX. THE UNVEILING

: unveiling.

What Deleuze and Guattari unveil is not “the truth” in the propositional sense. They unveil a way of seeing that, once adopted, cannot be unseen.

The Body without Organs is not true or false. It is adequate or inadequate to what it reveals.

The War Machine is not correct or incorrect. It is operational or inoperative.

The Rhizome is not valid or invalid. It is a diagram you navigate by — or do not.

This is the apocalyptic mode. This is what philosophy has always been, at its best. This is what it must become again.

The vision is offered. Reception or rejection is the only response.

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Note on Production. This essay is a development of a December 2025 blog post produced before the archive’s DOI-anchoring era. The present version adds citational capture (full bibliographic entries for all Deleuze/Guattari editions, biblical texts, and secondary literature), engages the five existing reception categories by name (Badiou, Hallward, Žižek, Colebrook, Massumi), incorporates the apocalyptic literature scholarship of Collins and Frye, and extends the Blake lineage through Bloom’s *Visionary Company*. The core thesis — that D+G operate in the apocalyptic mode and that their concepts are stable visionary loci rather than argued positions — is unchanged from the original.

Suggested Citation

Lee Sharks. “Apocalyptic Philosophy: Deleuze and Guattari and the Return of Vision” *Alexanarch*, 2026-03-26. <https://www.alexanarch.org/s/records/605/>

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